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Recent trends in higher education have led to the development of alternatives to traditional on-campus graduate degree programs. There is a concomitant need to understand student experience in field-based programs which support continuing education and career development for employed adults. The central purpose of this research was to explore the representation of student experience in academic journals written by thirty-five graduate students during their first term of study in a field-based Ed.D. program. Journals from two cohorts of students provided the empirical data for a grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis of cognitive and social dimensions of a new learning environment. The research questions were expository and non-directional due to the exploratory nature of this study.

The analysis focused on: (1) the elaboration of descriptive categories for types of writing in student journals (2) development of emergent conceptual categories related to social processes within the learning environment, and (3) identification of narrative features of journal writing. Qualitative data

analysis software was used to support grounded theory methods of coding, structuring, and analyzing the textual data.

A descriptive model of student experience was developed through graphic and textual representation of multiple perspectives drawn from student journals. Findings indicate that students used the journal writing assignment to reflect on their experience and communicate with the program director about both positive and negative aspects of that experience. Patterns, themes and differences in specific dimensions of student writing were identified. Systematic analysis of the journals afforded a unique perspective on the development of mutual connectedness and peer support within the cohorts. These findings underscore the significance of academic journals as social texts which express students' views of the learning environment and academic community. Implications for program design and teaching practices in field-based degree programs based on a cohort model were discussed.

# Making Sense: Journals as Tools for Learning and Representing Student Experience in a Field-Based Doctoral Program

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Sharon L. Smith, Author

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# PREFACE

## On the Title: Making Sense: Journals as Tools for Learning and Representing Student Experience in a Field-Based Doctoral Program

> When an anthropological observer enters the field, one of his most fundamental preconceptions is that he might eventually be able to make sense of the observations and notes which he records. This, after all is one of the basic tenets of scientific enquiry. (Latour & Woolgar 1986, p. 43)

> It is in the transaction between objective conditions and personal frames of reference that we make sense. The sense we make is what constitutes experience. (Eisner 1992, p. 13)

What do people mean when they talk about making sense? "Making sense" is such a common phrase that we seldom stop to think about it. In everyday language "making sense" is a figurative expression for a variety of ways of handling information or shaping our understanding. In other words, describing, defining, analyzing, synthesizing, organizing, representing (in visual or linguistic forms), framing, problem solving, etc., are all ways of making sense.

"Making sense" implies an active interpretive process and the title of this dissertation intentionally communicates something about how I perceive both journal writing and the analysis of journals. Journal writing is a way of making sense of the flow of personal experience. It is a way of telling about and imposing order on a sequence of events which requires the engagement of the writer. Similarly, scientific inquiry is a way of making sense (see Latour & Woolgar above). Representing the results of that inquiry in writing is, like

journal writing, a generative act. Both forms of writing create a narrative of experience. Narrative writing is a way of grasping and representing reality.

The narrative conventions of academic discourse can, and often do, obscure the active constitutive role or human agency involved in research; making sense as "the transaction between objective conditions and personal frames of reference" (Eisner 1992, p. 13). Writing up research in some fields of inquiry involves suppressing, as much as possible, all traces of the researcher's experience by relying on rhetorical strategies which distance the observer from the observed. Some researchers in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and education have recently drawn attention to discursive practices within those disciplines. At issue is the impact of authorial voice and representational practices on the way social reality is presented to the reader (Atkinson, 1990; Gitlin, 1990; Patai, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988, Van Maanen, 1988). It is not always necessary or desirable to discount personal, first-hand experience by writing in a way which preserves a fictive analytical distance through traditional academic discourse.

The research reported here involves my interpretation of the text(s) of student experience - academic journals. As journal writers, my peers and I were makers of meaning - authoring our own experience (Myerhoff, 1986). My role and relationship to the journals shifted when I became the researcher. I was first a journal writer, then a journal reader, and then the writer of a narrative account based on systematic inquiry. In traditional terms, I was a participant before I was an observer. Those two roles were subsequently interwoven as I analyzed the journals and wrote up the results. For this reason, I have used the first person pronoun and active voice in my dissertation. My personal frame of reference is not excluded or obscured but

openly acknowledged as an integral part of the research process. The reader can judge the sense I have made of my own and others' experience.

> Different ways of seeing give us different worlds. Different ways of saying allow us to represent different worlds. Helping people participate in a plurality of worlds made, I believe, is what education ought to try to achieve. (Eisner 1992, p. 14)

I believe, as Eisner does, that education ought to give us different ways of seeing, different ways of saying, different ways of representing and participating "in a plurality of worlds made." Too often, institutions of higher education limit one's capacity to acquire new perspectives or use new tools. Some departments are as likely to squash creativity as to encourage it. This was not my experience in the School of Education and for that I am truly grateful.

# MAKING SENSE: JOURNALS AS TOOLS FOR LEARNING AND REPRESENTING STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A FIELD-BASED DOCTORAL PROGRAM

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

This chapter provides an introduction to a study of academic journal writing and socialization in a field-based doctoral program in community college leadership. The research objective is twofold. The first is to describe and interpret the students' experience based on their narrative accounts; their views of the program, peer and faculty relationships, and other social and cognitive aspects of taking on the role of graduate student working towards an advanced degree. A related goal is to look at journal writing as a tool for learning in the context of graduate education.

Journals are complex sources of information. I will argue in the following pages that student journals can be viewed as artifacts of experience which provide the basis for constructing an understanding of individual learning and newcomer socialization in the first term of graduate study. The journals are at the center of the inquiry. They constitute the primary data for a conceptual analysis which weaves together several theoretical perspectives and a grounded theory approach to data analysis.

Journal writing produces narrative accounts of human experience and meaning structured from the point of view of the writer. From this standpoint, student journals are personal tools for making sense of newcomer experience in an educational setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990;

Gannett, 1987, 1992; Louis, 1980; Polkinghorne, 1988; Turner & Bruner, 1986). The analytic ethnographic research strategy employed in this study produces a descriptively detailed conceptual analysis derived through grounded theory methods.

Cognitive dimensions of student experience were explored through analysis of descriptive, affective, and reflective aspects of journal writing. This also provided an assessment of journal writing as a "sense-making activity." Conceptual categories for social dimensions of student experience were developed in a separate stage of analysis. These conceptual frameworks are integrated into a discussion of sociocognitive and discursive patterns of journal writing within this particular setting.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover, through systematic analysis of student journals, something about the individual and collective experience of two cohorts of adult students during a period of transition as they try to make sense of new learning and organizational environments. The immediate context for this study was an innovative field-based program for working professionals leading to a Doctor of Education degree. The non-traditional aspects of the program, such as weekend course delivery and short periods of residency on campus, allowed students to maintain other professional and personal commitments as they adjusted to participation in the program. As a consequence, however, they remained somewhat outside the sphere of the university and developed their understanding of roles and requirements primarily in weekend sessions and through communication with the

program director. Student journals were potentially significant resources for sharing and gathering information as well as documentation of the re-entry process.

## Rationale for the Study

In order to meet the needs of employed adults for continuing education and professional development, many colleges and universities have developed alternatives to traditional on-campus degree programs. Alternative programs often involve modified residency requirements and seminar style courses scheduled on weekends or evenings. Such programs provide an opportunity to achieve personal and career goals through formal education while maintaining employment. Although there is a considerable body of research on the effects of college on undergraduate students, research on the experience of graduate students is relatively less common (Egan, 1989; Louis & Turner, 1991). Moreover, there is a striking absence of research on new models of graduate education. The development of a new doctoral program for employed professionals in community colleges afforded an opportunity to research their experience with an alternative approach to graduate education at a public land grant university.

Newcomer socialization is a phenomenon of interest in many organizational settings. Traditionally, socialization of recruits is most often approached from the perspective of the organization - how to facilitate the integration of newcomers into pre-existing roles and organizational structures. In this view, socialization is imposed on the newcomer who is the object of efforts to transmit social values and roles (Wexler, 1987).

Alternatively, the newcomer can be viewed as an active, transformative individual subject who is a participant in the socialization process. Some recent work in organizational and educational sociology reflects this shift in emphasis (Bauer & Green, 1994; Wexler, 1987). Many empirical studies of newcomer socialization in formal organizations of work or schooling are based on quantitative analysis of data derived from questionnaires. This study looks at how newcomers represent their transition through qualitative analysis of their written accounts of the socialization experience.

Keeping a journal has been recommended as a useful strategy for personal professional development for teachers and educational administrators (Cooper, 1991; Holly, 1989; Kottkamp, 1990). Journals are widely used in academic settings as an informal heuristic device to personalize the learning process (Fulwiler, 1987; Gannett, 1987; Gannett, 1992). Because many scholars and teachers view writing as a unique "mode of learning" (Emig, 1977), academic journal writing is often an assigned learning activity. Journal writing has been used as an instructional activity or tool for learning in graduate courses but systematic analysis of the product of that process is relatively rare. (Carswell, 1988). Writing a reflective journal following each monthly meeting was one of the requirements of participation in the community college leadership program. The program director established this requirement because of the perceived value for individual students and as a means of obtaining feedback about the program and student perspectives. Student journals provided an unobtrusive means of gaining insight into personal-professional development during a formal program of study at the doctoral level. This study of a unique group of adult students negotiating a new phase of professional development can contribute to emerging theoretical perspectives on graduate student socialization.

Synthesizing student reactions, opinions, and attitudes related to the learning experience though the analysis of course-related journals can support program planning and instructional design. The study also allows for assessment of the effectiveness of journal writing as a technique to help adult learners develop a capacity for critical reflection on professional practice. The journals provide a window into the underlying social dimensions of graduate education among cohorts of adults in a doctoral program.

## The Inquiry Paradigm and Research Questions

This study is an inquiry into the subjective experience of adult students during the first four months of participation in a new graduate program. The research objectives center on a more specific contextualization of journal writing and socialization. The nature of the data and the aim of understanding the professional (re)socialization of students in a particular context suggested the value of an interpretive approach to research design and analysis. The underlying epistemology of qualitative research leads to an emphasis on identifying patterns and regularities rather than testing hypotheses derived from received theory. The overarching goal of interpretive research is "to frame the study in terms of the constructs used by those who are studied" (LeCompte, 1993, p. 13).

The study is exploratory. The relevant dimensions of student journal writing in a particular setting cannot be predicted. As a starting point for the discovery process there are two broad areas of interest: (1) How do adults make sense of social and cognitive dimensions of a new learning experience in written narrative accounts called journals? (2) Does journal writing have

value as an instructional activity or resource for learning in a field-based doctoral program? More specific questions include the following:

- What are the primary issues and concerns expressed by adult students adapting to new roles, requirements, and collegial relationships?
- Are there recurrent themes in student journals? What satisfactions or frustrations do students encounter?
- Do academic journals include reflection on professional issues? Do students use journal writing as a means to examine the relationship between classroom learning experiences and action in their professional lives?
- Is there an identifiable narrative structure to student accounts of learning events and experiences?
- Can systematic analysis of student journals provide useful information for program evaluation and improvement?

## The Roles of the Researcher

Research is a process of engagement; a specific kind of human practice which is not merely a technical application of specific skills, but essentially a social activity with political, ethical, and ideological dimensions. The integrity of this process requires an understanding of the core assumptions and practices the researcher brings to the study of a particular phenomenon (Morgan, 1983). Some of the ideological dimensions of my approach to this research project can be discerned from citations which acknowledge specific intellectual debts. There is, however, an irreducible element of subjectivity

which should also be acknowledged. Peshkin (1988) recommends that researchers pay close attention to their subjectivity while actively engaged in the research process. This allows them to clarify for themselves, as well as for their readers, what impact personal values and subjectivity might have on their research. The following "subjectivity audit" establishes my relationship to the program, participants, and journals in this study.

I was a member of the first cohort to enter the community college leadership program. As I looked around the room during the orientation meeting in September 1992, I thought a study of the cohort and its experience in the doctoral program would be an interesting research topic. Although I mentioned this in a journal entry (dated September 25, 1992), it was not something I considered for myself. Several months later, as I began to think seriously about research for a dissertation, the program director suggested an analysis of the journals written by cohort members. My first reaction was that I did not want to study my own cohort. I did not want to deal with the personal, ethical, and methodological implications of such an study. During the second year of coursework, however, I began to feel that the study would best be accomplished by an "insider"; someone who knew firsthand the people, the program, and some of the pleasures, pressures, and frustrations of the participants.

Journal entries I wrote as a student in the program were included in the materials to be analyzed. They were not "field notes" because I did not take on the role of a "fieldworker" until after I completed my coursework in June 1994. My journals reflected my views of faculty, course content, instruction, curriculum, the program and participant interaction in the context of our meetings from the perspective of a cohort member.

After I formally proposed this study to other participants in the program and obtained permission to read their journals, I took on the role of "anthropological observer" (Latour & Woolgar 1986, p. 43). I attended monthly cohort meetings during 1994-1995 as assistant to the program director. In this way, I maintained contact with members of the second cohort, the program director, and program faculty. I presented a broad overview of my research plan during one of their research class meetings. Several members offered helpful suggestions about how data might be represented.

My role as "expert witness" rests on participation as a member, ongoing involvement with other participants (both faculty and students), and careful reading of the journals. At this point, I felt prepared to be the "ethnographer"; to re-tell the cohort experience by looking at the journals as "sense-making" activity and artifact of a period of newcomer socialization.

## Research Plan

I approached this work within parameters imposed by a particular mode of inquiry and theoretical perspectives. The data coding and analysis scheme necessarily emphasized particular features of student experience as represented in the journals; social and cognitive dimensions. The research plan involved intensive analysis of sources of data within a structured analytic framework designed to organize individual and collective perspectives on a process over time. The research goal was identification of coherent patterns of student response and or development as each cohort moved through the first term of the program.

The journals of students in the community college leadership program were more than just a set of disconnected first person accounts. Students entered as a cohort and worked together in teams throughout the coursework phase of the program. Being part of the cohort experience had social and temporal dimensions. Taken as a whole, the journals represent multiple perspectives on a process taking place over time. In order to preserve a sense of the collective experience unfolding over time, analysis was conducted in a structured, sequential manner. Each individual journal entry was treated as basic unit of analysis or "strip" (Agar, 1986; Goffman, 1974). Combined journal entries for each class meeting formed a collective transcript which was coded line-by-line using relatively open preliminary coding schemas for socialization and journal writing. As new categories emerged during the analysis, the analytic categories or schema were revised. These procedures are described in greater detail in chapter four.

## Limitations of the Study

The research objectives focus on description and interpretation of narrative accounts of student experiences in the program. Various aspects of academic journal writing were explored through grounded theory methods. Given the focus of the study, the approach taken here is based on data which are essentially student "self-reports." Program faculty and administrators undoubtedly viewed the process and the program in different terms. Their views are not represented in this study.

Informed consent, including permission to use student journals for research and publication, was secured through a presentation of the research

plan at a regularly scheduled cohort meeting in June 1994. Because an agreement to participate was predicated on disclosure and a relationship of trust between peers in the program, no journals from the five students who left the program before June 1994 were included in the analysis. Four students dropped out of the first cohort; one per term for the first four terms (Fall 1992 through Fall 1993). The second cohort lost one student during the first year of the program. The perspective of program-leavers is outside the scope of this study.

All of the journals were read and coded by one person. Therefore the analysis and interpretation are the product of one "human instrument." Although this negates the issue of interrater reliability, it also leaves open the question of researcher bias. Throughout the research and writing of the dissertation, I have drawn attention to my active, constructive role in the process. I have also, however, tried to provide sufficient methodological information so that others could understand and retrace each step. These research practices help to establish descriptive and interpretive validity for the study.

## Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the goals of this study, inquiry paradigm, research procedures and interpretive process. My views about the complexity of my relationship to this particular study as both participant and observer are presented. This is followed by an overview of the research plan for systematic qualitative analysis of academic journals and student experience. The research strategy taken here has specific limitations which were noted. Two

central components of the research process, theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks, are defined and elaborated in the next two chapters. Research procedures and data management decisions are presented in detail in the fourth chapter. Steps taken to address descriptive and interpretive validity are included there also. The analytical process and outcomes of the study are presented in chapter five with data displayed in graphs and text to illustrate a descriptive model of student experience . The chapter is organized around the initial conceptual schemas and emergent categories developed during the analysis. The initial research questions are reviewed and discussed in the final chapter. This is followed by further discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of the study. The last chapter concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

> There is no untheoretical way to 'see' an 'object.' The 'object' is only perceived and understood through an internal organization of data, mediated by conceptual constructs and ways of seeing the world. The final account of an object says as much about the observer as it does about the object. (Willis 1980, p. 90)

## The Role of Theory in this Study

Theories provide a set of interrelated concepts which "offer ways of looking at the world which are essential in defining a research problem" (Silverman 1993, p. 2). Theories vary in terms of scope, degree of formality, and levels of generality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Stinchcombe, 1968). Although the role of theory in qualitative studies is a topic of some dispute, I agree with Silverman (1993, p. 1) that "without a theory, there is nothing to research." (See also Willis, 1980 cited above.) The role of theory in this study is to develop "sensitivity toward theoretical issues when looking at social phenomena" (Strauss 1987, p. 299). Theory also provides a standpoint from which to "see the world," as well as a way of positioning particular "objects" within a researcher's sphere of interest. It is not accidental that western theorists often use the metaphor of the lens to describe "ways of seeing." (Berger, 1972). Ways of seeing are usually associated with variations in "ways of knowing."

One of the research goals of this study is to develop a substantive theory about a phenomenon - student journals - within a particular situational context - a doctoral program (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 174). According to Stinchcombe (1968, p. 4), "Constructing theories of social phenomena is done

best by those who have a variety of theoretical strategies to try out." The theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter are those which helped me develop theoretical sensitivity, clarify core assumptions, and identify useful strategies for interpretation.

This study emerges out of the juxtaposition of several theoretical perspectives. Although these perspectives are drawn from several academic disciplines, they help to establish the significance of text in the representation of human experience and meaning. The first perspective is the anthropology of experience which allows me to conceptualize journals as constructed expressions which articulate a double consciousness of experience - the journal writer is both a participant in the setting and an author/narrator who reports on the experience in writing. The text (journal) is a form of social expression and an artifact which is accessible for interpretation. An overview of narrative and narrative studies in the human sciences provides an interpretive framework which emphasizes the active construction and exploration of meaning built into narrative accounts of experience. Next I consider some of the implications of using personal documents as primary data for an ethnographic interpretation of student experience.

## Anthropology of Experience: Journals as Expressions

The anthropology of experience is a theoretical perspective which puts primary emphasis on human experience and various forms of expression such as ritual, folklore, art, theater, and literature. Several examples of this work were brought together in a volume edited by the late Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (1986). It is part of a trend toward an interpretive-

performative perspective in contemporary social anthropology but should not be considered a "definitive paradigm" (Bruner 1986, p. 4). The anthropology of experience draws attention to ways people represent their experience and the importance of taking those expressions as the starting point for the study of culture.

> Expressions are the peoples' articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience. Although expressions are not necessarily easy places to start, because of their existential complexity, they usually are accessible and isolable, in part because they have a beginning and an ending. (Bruner 1986, p. 9)

Expressions as varied as dance, storytelling, shadow plays, murals, and cock fights have been studied as social texts which represent the means by which people "put experience into circulation" (Turner 1986, p. 37). The anthropology of experience allows me to "see" the student journals (as "objects" of study and interpretation) as representations of individual experience related to an instructional goal or purpose but also as texts which were part of the social environment or ritual of schooling in a particular time and place. Students' accounts of class activities, readings, interactions with peers and faculty, feelings of anxiety or joy, or reflections on personal history are connected to life around them and have social import and meaning. Although the nominal purpose of student journal writing in the community college leadership program was to provide a means of communication between the students and the program director, the journals fit the definition of "expression" - a text for interpretation of indigenous meaning at the level of everyday experience.

## Journals as Narrative: Narrative Studies and Narratology

When people write about their experiences they are creating a narrative account of experience. Scholes & Comley (1981, p. 162) provided the following explanation of narrative and narration:

> To narrate is to tell the story of a sequence of events, whether long or short, great or small, real or fictional...The most important element of narrative discourse is time...In the art of fiction, narration is developed in the direction of emotional intensity...But narration is also used simply to report on events of interest and to preserve the memory of things that have happened to people.

This is a simple definition of narrative but it is congruent with contemporary theoretical perspectives on narrative in psychology (Bruner, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1988), hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1991) literary theory (Polkinghorne, 1988), anthropology (see above) and other social science disciplines (Riessman, 1993). Narrative studies are part of a long-standing tradition in the human sciences which is again attracting attention from researchers in many disciplines. Educational researchers who place the experience of students and teachers at the center of their research agenda have recently shown considerable interest in narrative inquiry although it is not always specifically acknowledged as such (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

The subjective nature of the account shaped by the individual informant is an important aspect of narrative inquiry. Narratives do not "speak for themselves." They are representations or interpretations of primary experience from the teller's point of view and encompass the narrator's meaning systems and understanding.

> Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. Because it is a cognitive process, a mental operation, narrative meaning is not an 'object' available to direct observation. However, the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narrative are available for direct observation. Examples of narrative include personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales, novels, and the everyday stories we use to explain our own and others' actions. (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 1)

Narrative analysis is an interpretive approach used to study first-person accounts of experiences, actions and events. In a brief overview and guide to this approach, Riessman (1993) wrote, "Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects" (p. 70). Student journals are narratives in the sense that they "report on events of interest and preserve the memory of things that have happened" (Scholes & Comley 1981, p. 162) and involve creative cognitive processes which "organize human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 1).

## Journals as Personal Documents and Data for Ethnographic Interpretation

Researchers in the social sciences have a long history of using personal documents as primary data (Plummer, 1983; Holbrook, 1995, Gottschalk, Kluckhohn, & Angell, 1951). Redfield (1951, p. vii) defined the personal document as "one in which the human and personal characteristics of somebody who is in some sense the author of the document finds expression, so that through its means the reader of the document comes to know the author and his views of events with which the document is concerned." Redfield's definition is broad enough to encompass a range of documents

such as memos, letters, diaries, photographs, films, fieldnotes, and autobiographies. Such "documents of life" are valued for their capacity to capture something about the subjective views of particular human beings in a particular socio-historic context (Plummer, 1983). Letters and journals have been used as sources of ethnographic data (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Plummer, 1983). In simple terms, the ethnographic research model is aimed at "folk description," cultural interpretation based on the constructs of those studied.

Student journals are personal documents, but they are artifacts of a particular kind of experience, written for a particular purpose. Although they are presumably confidential and not intended to be widely distributed or shared, they are not private personal documents. Writing a journal for someone else to read has some implications for the writer as well as the reader(s). The presentation of self in journal writing involves selective representation of experience but this is not unlike the presentation of self in an ethnographic interview. Ethnographic representation rests on the assumption that "When people represent themselves, it is as they want other people to see them. This is a cultural form of presentation of self in which political issues become relevant" (Rubel & Rosman 1994, p. 339). Any ethnography of schooling must recognize that students have a different view of instructional encounters than faculty and may structure their accounts to represent themselves as they want to be seen.

## Summary

In general, these theoretical perspectives provide overlapping frames of interpretation for conceptualizing the journal as a type of cultural text, a

narrative representation of personal experience, expressive of the narrator's point of view and embedded in a particular social context. Various approaches to narrative inquiry are used in social science disciplines but they have in common an emphasis on interpretation and textual analysis as "ways of knowing" or making sense of social life.

The theoretical perspectives reviewed above also support the empirical integrity of journals as social texts which can provide primary data for ethnographic interpretation of student experience. This is based on the following core assumptions:

1. Journals are a form of personal expression "authored" by individuals who inscribe something of their own subjectivity into narrative accounts of events and experiences.

2. Narratives are valuable resources for the study of human experience. Journals are material artifacts of experience which can be interpreted in order to enhance understanding of cultural phenomena.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND SENSITIZING CONCEPTS

> A sensitizing concept...gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look. (Blumer 1969, p. 148)

Theoretical perspectives introduced in the previous chapter provided only part of the context for research questions, interpretive strategies, and methodological decisions. In this chapter, the focus is on conceptual frameworks related to journal writing and socialization. The scholarly literature in each of these areas is extensive and the work reviewed here was selected to highlight key working theories and concepts that guide and frame the study. The first section reviews literature related to various aspects of journal writing for personal and professional development, especially course-related academic journals. This is followed by an overview of organizational socialization and socialization in graduate education. In the last section, I review and comment on how the conceptual frameworks on journal writing and newcomer socialization can be brought together in a study of the form and function of journal writing grounded in a particular setting.

The primary objective of this study is to develop an understanding of the learning experiences of two cohorts of adult students during their first term of coursework in a new doctoral program by looking for patterns and themes in academic journals. For this study, journals are both a resource and a topic of study. Viewed from one angle, they are the raw material for the exploration of graduate student socialization. The journals are artifacts of the experience of community college faculty and administrators during their first few months of study in a doctoral program. From another perspective, academic

journals are part of the teaching/learning environment. They are tools for learning and communication with others about learning.

I have taken the position that journal writing is both a cognitive and a social act in the sense of producing an account of personal experience which can be (and is sometimes intended to be) read by someone other than the journal writer. Because I view journals as meaningful narratives of personal experience, the research paradigm is interpretive and hermeneutic. The research strategy is based on narrative analysis. The method is grounded theory, a qualitative research process which emphasizes the discovery and elaboration of theory built from empirical data.

## Journal Writing as a Cognitive and Social Act

Journal writing is both a cognitive and a social act. In order to develop this view of journal writing, several aspects of keeping a journal must be considered: journal writing as a cognitive or learning activity; journal writing as personal narrative; and journal writing as "thought made social." Schiwy (1994, p. 235) emphasized the complex nature of journals in the following, "The personal journal may serve as the intermediate space in which private and public, personal and political, individual and social, experiential and conceptual concerns meet and intersect." Although it is difficult to unravel such a complex view of journals, the literature reviewed in this chapter suggests some interesting directions for inquiry.

Writing is thinking on paper, a unique way of learning and representing our thoughts (Emig, 1977; Howard & Barton, 1986). Keeping a journal is often recommended as a way to document and make sense of personal experience,

enhance personal and professional development, and as an aid to reflection, problem solving, and self-understanding (Cooper & Dunlap, 1991; Garmston & Wellman, 1994; Holly, 1989; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; McAlpine, 1992). Academic journal writing is used by faculty and students to meet various objectives. Journal writing has been widely used in composition courses and writing across the curriculum since the early 1960s (Gannett, 1987). In this context, journal writing is a type of informal writing intended to help students engage subject matter, identify gaps in knowledge, improve written communication of ideas, and become more reflective (Carswell, 1988; Fulwiler,1987; Gannett, 1992; Kottkamp, 1990).

Many teacher education programs integrate journal writing into coursework and program requirements to encourage critical reflection (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990). Keeping a journal is a technique or tool that can be used by teachers or educational administrators to engage in reflection about their practice (Cooper and Dunlap, 1991; McAlpine, 1992). According to McAlpine (1992), journal writing is also a useful instructional device which forms the basis for "professional conversation" beneficial to both teachers and learners, especially where opportunities or time for oral discussion are limited. She identifies three modes of writing about professional experiences: descriptive writing; cathartic writing; and reflective writing. Descriptive writing describes the learning experience from the perspective of the learner; the setting, participants, and events. Cathartic writing recounts emotions or feelings. Reflective writing establishes connections between the learning experience (including feelings and emotions) and professional experience. These types of writing are frequently intertwined in student journals but occasionally one mode is predominant. Writing a journal helps the student integrate learning and practice. Reviewing the journal allows the instructor

to respond to the learner; to give direction, advice or support. In the process of responding to the journal, the instructor also learns more about the student's learning experience, including personal or work-related factors which may affect learning.

Educational theorists and teacher education programs have shown increasing interest in the idea of "reflective practice" in recent years (Tremmel, 1993). This interest was fueled by two seminal works written by Donald A. Schön, The Reflective Practitioner (1983) and Educating the Reflective Practitioner (1990). Schön has shown particular interest in how professionals are prepared for "real world" practice. Professional schools have a dual orientation. They are embedded in the university with its traditional focus on subject disciplines, basic research, and technical rationality. But they are charged with preparing competent practitioners who must apply academic research to messy, indeterminate, real-life situations. Professional schools, Schön suggests, can help students bridge the gap between university and practice by including a "reflective practicum" in the curriculum. In his view "...the practicum should become a place in which practitioners learn to reflect on their own tacit theories of the phenomena of practice, in the presence of representatives whose formal theories are comparable to the tacit theories of practitioners" (p. 321).

A journal writing assignment allows the student to capture the learning experience in his or her own words. It becomes a "space" to work through the tension and excitement associated with new educational experiences and expectations (cf. Schiwy, 1994). Although the class journal is produced for another reader (faculty or program director), it is a personal document in the sense that it reveals the participant's view of events or situations and the meaning derived from the experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The student

journal writer is "constructing a text" or narrative of personal experience in a particular context.

A number of studies which used journals as a source of data have been published in recent years. Cooper & Dunlap (1991) interviewed twelve educational administrators who had kept journals for at least one year. Qualitative analysis of interview data indicated that participants used journal writing to solve problems, document decision making and personal growth, and as a means of "sorting through administrative chaos" (p. 71). Gannett (1987, 1992) based her dissertation and book on observations about gender and journal writing in sophomore level college composition classes. Her dissertation research involved intensive study of six student journals; three authored by women, three by men. There were patterned differences linked to gender in these journals. Characteristic topics, uses, and functions of journal keeping were different for men and women. According to Gannett, these differences are linked to the ways in which men and women perceive traditions of journal keeping. Women tended to write longer entries, be more reflective about academic and personal matters, and occasionally used the journal to draft important letters. Men were more likely to express negative emotions about school and school-related activities.

Carswell (1988) used journals as a form of classroom research in a graduate curriculum course. Twenty-four students participated by keeping a journal. The journals were shared with the instructor every two weeks, but were not graded. Carswell found that journals enhanced communication between students and instructor. Students' comments gave valuable feedback about aspects of course design and activities. Thus student journals served the purpose of formative evaluation as well as communication.

## Organizational Socialization

Socialization is a lifelong process which takes place in many different settings (Van Maanen, 1984). Organizational socialization is defined as "the primary process by which people adapt to new jobs and organizational roles" (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994, p. 730). When newcomers enter any organizational setting they are expected to learn new routines, rules, roles, and norms which are relevant in the context of that organization. According to Van Maanen, "...work careers as well as educational careers are marked by observable and more or less ordered role and status shifts, each entailing different mixes of responsibility, skill, colleagues, and required behavior" (1984, p. 213).

Current literature on organizational socialization includes theoretical models and empirical studies of socialization in work organizations. Some researchers focus on the process of socialization; steps or stages by which the newcomer acquires sufficient knowledge to become a member of the organization (Louis, 1980; Jones 1983; Jones, 1986). Others have been primarily concerned with the outcomes of organizational socialization, especially effects on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee turnover (Chao, et al, 1994; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1994). Recurrent themes in this literature include the negative impact of unmet expectations on job performance and tenure, and the influence of peers and supervisors.

Louis (1980) and Jones (1986) have suggested that reducing uncertainty and anxiety is a major goal for newcomers. Louis identified some gaps in earlier approaches to newcomer socialization which were grounded in two competing paradigms. Experimental and organizational psychology research

tended to focus on turnover and rational action strategies to reduce recruit turnover. Alternatively, socialization research based on phenomenology and social interactionism tended to emphasize role-related learning and organizational culture. The major deficiency in both turnover and socialization research, according to Louis, was a failure to understand the how newcomers cope with the new organizational setting. To address this gap, Louis proposed a theoretical model which identified key features of newcomer "sense-making." (p. 235) When a newcomer enters an organization, he or she experiences change, contrast, and surprise. Change is "an objective difference in a major feature between the new and old settings." Contrast is a person-specific distinguishing feature of the new setting. Different contrasts will emerge for different individuals. For example, mode of dress might be a noticeable feature or contrast. Surprise is the third feature of organizational entry. It represents "a difference between an individual's anticipations and subsequent experiences in the new setting. Surprise also encompasses one's affective reactions to any differences, including contrasts and changes" (Louis 1980, p. 237).

## Socialization of Graduate Students

Graduate education is generally thought of as a period of intense study and preparation for new professional roles. In many respects, returning to graduate school in mid-career is not unlike taking on a new job in a new work organization. Colleges and universities are complex organizations with established requirements and expectations of students in degree programs. Aronson & Swanson (1991) described the traditional view of graduate school

as "...a transitional period of socialization into the norms of academic life. In that we are learning theories, information and methods of research, we are indeed novices, working toward fuller knowledge of our fields (pp. 156-57)." Returning to the role of novice or otherwise redefining professional identity is, perhaps necessarily, an uncomfortable experience.

Several scholars have made note of the discomfiting effects of graduate study. Professional socialization in graduate education is intended to reshape the student's intellectual perspective and professional self-concept. To some extent this implies a deficit in the students' present identity and may have a negative effect on self-concept (Egan, 1989). It is not uncommon for graduate students, especially women and minorities, to feel marginalized within the academic power structure (Louis & Turner, 1991; Schroeder & Mynatt, 1993; Turner & Thompson, 1993). Faculty-student interaction is one area in which the socialization experience of women and men in graduate school is different. Women graduate students are more likely to perceive less support from faculty than their male counterparts (Hite, 1985; Schroeder & Mynatt, 1993).

Graduate study in a particular department and university involves learning new organizational roles and collegial relationships but newcomer socialization in this context is largely unstructured and informal. Professors and students may have roughly equivalent understandings of the major steps in the process and the ultimate goal but their ideas about how various stages will be negotiated may be dissimilar (Isaac, Quinlan, & Walker, 1992) According to Clark & Corcoran (1986, p. 20):

> The basic forms and functions of graduate education are similar across disciplines, but the actual processes vary among disciplines and departments, and even within departments among pair of students and advisors...The result is that different

> environment and context for learning are experienced and that little is known of this variety even by academics themselves.

Student expectations of graduate study may also be incongruent with specific organizational structures and program requirements. This can impact retention and graduate students' ability or desire to complete degree requirements (Louis & Turner, 1991).

The student, the department, and the university have an interest in successful student socialization. "Learning the ropes" quickly and well can make graduate study a less frustrating experience from the perspective of the student. Steady academic progress and timely completion of the degree are desirable outcomes for all parties. However, when socialization is narrowly conceived as "learning the ropes" in order to "jump through the hoops" imposed by the department/university, the student is positioned (metaphorically, at least) as relatively passive and powerless.

Based on his own research on adult transformation, Nelson (1994, p. 397) argued that "Investigating how adult learners imaginatively make sense of disconfirming experience may contribute significantly to a more adequate understanding and explanation of the transformational quality of autobiographical learning." In Nelson's view most of the theory and practice of adult learning emphasizes critical reflection and neglects the power of imagination to reshape meaning perspectives.

## Summary: Core Assumptions and Sensitizing Concepts

The current study combines two lines of inquiry - organizational socialization and journal writing as writing-to-learn in the context of a field-

based graduate program. Certain core assumptions and sensitizing concepts which suggest directions for inquiry may be drawn from the literature reviewed in this chapter.

Writing is an important learning activity frequently incorporated into instructional plans and degree programs to encourage reflection and communication between faculty and student. Although qualitative methods are frequently used in research on journal writing, in many instances it is difficult to determine exactly how the analysis was accomplished. The present study focuses on students' experiences in an academic setting as represented in their written accounts. If newcomers use their writing to "make sense" of new role and task structures in graduate education by reflecting on that experience, systematic analysis of journal writing should allow the researcher to "make sense" of their experience. The affective and cognitive dimensions of their writing should provide insight into the socialization process during a period of personal and professional transition.

Newcomers or recruits may experience "transition troubles" in work or educational organizations (Van Maanen, 1984). Learning new roles and rules is part of a socialization process in work and educational settings. This process frequently involves some discomfort for the newcomer due to unmet expectations, threats to self-concept, or simple recognition of contrast between prior experience and current situation. Recent research on organizational socialization based on quantitative analysis of questionnaire data suggests that unmet expectations and social relationships with peers and supervisors have an impact on successful socialization. The actual processes of graduate education vary across disciplines, departments and university settings. The impact of these differences in the learning environment are not clear. Better understanding of socialization processes may improve persistence and

retention and reduce personal and organizational costs associated with dropping out.

# RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Research procedures bring theoretical perspectives, conceptual frameworks and empirical data together. This study features the analysis of text as empirical data from which to develop an understanding of students' experience as they enter a new doctoral program. The data are first person accounts of educational experiences; written narratives about class sessions which frequently touch on other aspects of the writer's personal or work-related experience. The research methodology encompasses text as qualitative data, conceptual analysis, description and interpretation.

Data analysis is always embedded within a conceptual framework influenced by a research tradition. Theoretical perspectives and sensitizing concepts which provide the framework for the analysis were introduced in the preceding chapters. Research procedures for this study combine ethnographic and grounded theory methodologies (Agar, 1986; Lofland, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). My aim was to incorporate a systematic descriptive and analytic approach to the empirical data without discounting interpretive and representational responsibility as an ethnographer/narrator representing the views of participants.

In this chapter I describe the research procedures, including grounded theory methods, in some detail. My objective is to establish analytic rigor by presenting the formal, logical features of the analysis combined with the contextual and specific characteristics of this particular study. First I discuss the organizational context of the program, general characteristics of the participants, and how access to the journals was negotiated. My decisions regarding choice of qualitative data analysis software, preliminary data management and data analysis procedures are reviewed. The conceptual

frameworks for coding types of writing and dimensions of socialization are introduced. A brief discussion of analytic rigor and interpretive validity concludes this chapter.

## Organizational Context of the Program

The primary textual data for the study are journals written by students in the first two cohorts admitted to a field-based graduate program offered by the school of education at a publicly supported land grant university. The program was designed as a non-traditional program for working professionals employed in community college settings. It is a post-Master's degree program leading to the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degree. Participants entered as a cohort and worked together in small work groups throughout the coursework phase of the program. Classes were scheduled for one weekend per month during the academic year. Additional coursework was scheduled for summer months. The first cohort of twenty students was admitted to the program in Fall 1992. Cohort two entered in September 1993.

The program director introduced the journal writing requirement at the first (orientation) meeting for each cohort. Students were asked to write a journal entry following every class session reflecting on or offering a critique of any aspect of the learning activity. Instructions about journal writing were relatively open-ended, allowing students to interpret the assignment based on their own understanding of what was expected or required. Journals were mailed or electronically transmitted to the program director for his review and comments. Copies, including the program director's comments, were

made for a master file of journals maintained by the program director. The program director returned journals to students at scheduled class meetings.

## Characteristics of Participants

Thirty-five students were actively enrolled in the program in June 1994 when I asked members of cohorts one and two to participate in the study. Cohort one included 16 students; 10 women and 6 men who had completed eighteen months of course work between September 1992 and June 1994. Cohort two, completing their first academic year (September, 1993 through June, 1994), included 19 students; 13 women and 6 men. All but one of the cohort members were employed in community colleges or other educational organizations. Two held administrative positions in K-12 systems. One member of cohort one was not employed. The remaining students held professional positions as faculty or administrators in community colleges.

No journals written by students who withdrew from the program before June 1994 were included in the study. Their reasons for leaving the program are unknown but their transition into the role of student in the community college leadership program was interrupted. All but one of the students who withdrew, left the program within the first year of coursework. Because I negotiated access to student journals in a face-to-face presentation of the purpose and goals of the study, I chose not to contact anyone who was not enrolled at that time.

## Gaining Access to the Data

I presented an overview of the proposed research project to each cohort during the June 1994 weekend meeting. Following a brief question and answer period, I distributed an informed consent form previously approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. The form disclosed the intended uses of journal material, the voluntary nature of participation, and protection of privacy for students by eliminating personal names and organizational identification. A copy of this form is included in Appendix A. All members of cohorts one and two agreed to participate under the conditions specified in the consent form. The program director granted access to his master file of photocopied student journals in the summer of 1994. After several unsuccessful attempts to scan photocopied journals into a readable text file, I manually re-entered 117 documents. Forty-six journal entries from cohort one and 71 journal entries from cohort two are included in the study. Journal entries cover four class meetings for each cohort: September through December 1992 for cohort one; September through December 1993 for cohort two.

| Student | one | two | three | four |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | X |
| 2 | | | | X |
| 3 | | | | X |
| 4 | | | | X |
| 5 | | | | X |
| 6 | | | | X |
| 7 | | | | X |
| 8 | | | X | |
| 9 | | | X | |
| 10 | | | X | |
| 11 | | | X | |
| 12 | | X | | |
| 13 | | X | | |
| 14 | X | | | |
| 15 | X | | | |
| 16 | X | | | |

Figure 1. Number Of Journals Completed By Cohort One Members

Most students submitted journals after each class session but there were some exceptions. The number of journals submitted by cohort members for the period included in this study are indicated in Figures 1 and 2.

| Student | one | two | three | four |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | X |
| 2 | | | | X |
| 3 | | | | X |
| 4 | | | | X |
| 5 | | | | X |
| 6 | | | | X |
| 7 | | | | X |
| 8 | | | | X |
| 9 | | | | X |
| 10 | | | | X |
| 11 | | | | X |
| 12 | | | | X |
| 13 | | | | X |
| 14 | | | | X |
| 15 | | | X | |
| 16 | | | X | |
| 17 | | | X | |
| 18 | | | X | |
| 19 | | | X | |

Figure 2. Number Of Journals Completed By Cohort Two Members

## Preliminary Data Management Decisions

Qualitative data analysis is complex, time-consuming and labor intensive (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 2). A variety of computer applications are available to support data management, data analysis, and documentation of the research process for qualitative researchers. For this study I chose NUD*IST (Version 3.0), an application created specifically to support a grounded theory approach to structuring and interpreting textual data derived from fieldnotes, documents, or interviews (Richards & Richards, 1994). The acronym NUD*IST stands for Non-numeric Unstructured Data - Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing. It is a multi-functional software package with a graphical user interface (windows, menus, and dialog boxes). Not only does the software facilitate document storage and management, it allows for systematic analysis and exploration of ideas about the documents by means of an index system based on codes or categories created by the researcher.

On-line documents must be entered into NUD*IST as ASCII text files. As noted above, student journals for four class meetings for each cohort, September, October, November, and December, of the first term in the program, were entered into a word processing program. Journals for cohort one cover September 1992 through December 1992. For cohort two, journals cover September 1993 through December 1993. At this point, individual journal entries became a segment of a larger transcript for a particular class meeting. Each segment was given an alphabetic code for the name of the student. All other personal names of cohort members, faculty members, committee members, friends or family members were replaced with generic

labels. College names were also replaced with a generic label. Alterations to the original text of the journals were indicated in the text file by brackets around the changes; e.g., [cohort member] or [community college]. In order to allow for line by line analysis and coding, the text was saved as ASCII text with line breaks. These files became the "raw files" or documents introduced into NUD*IST.

## Journals as Data

In this section I describe the characteristics of the journals as textual data to provide a sense of the quantitative parameters of the material included in the analysis. There were 117 separate student journal entries. Journal entries for each cohort meeting were merged and analyzed as eight summary transcripts (four for each cohort) of participants' accounts. Merging journal entries into text files for analysis effectively standardizes line length and allows for comparison of the quantity of material in various categories. The total number of lines of text included in the merged files is 7556. That total includes headers, subheaders, and lines which demarcate individual entries and paragraphs. The merged text files include 2840 text units for cohort one (N=16). Journal entries from cohort two (N=19) comprise 4716 lines. Journals from cohort one members (46% of the study participants) equal 37.5% of the text available for analysis. Sixty-two percent of the text units came from cohort two members. Over the four month time periods covered in this study (September - December 1992; September - December 1993) the overall number of lines per session decreased each month for both cohorts. Figure 3 represents the text units per class meeting by cohort.

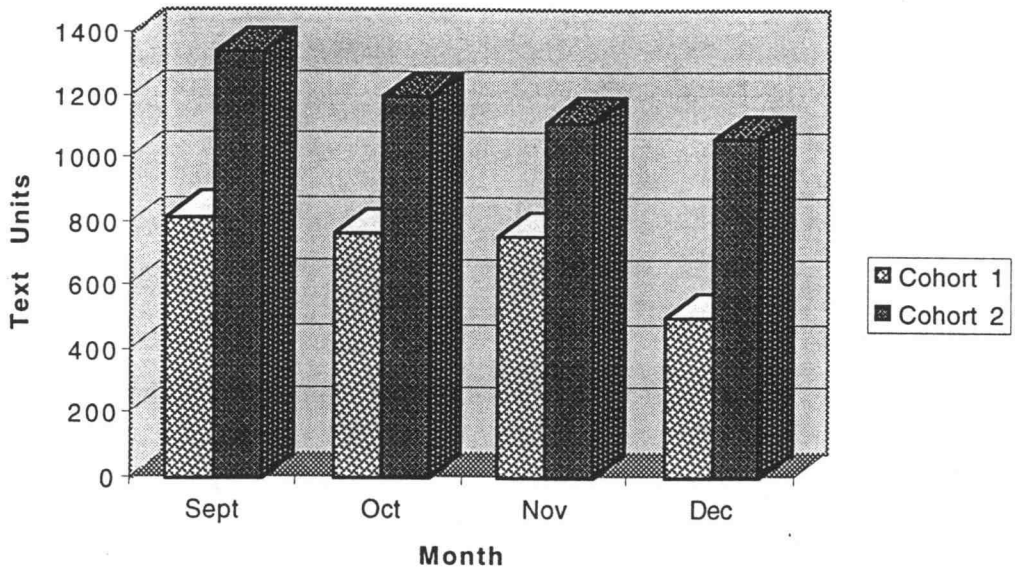


Figure 3. Text Units per Class Meeting by Cohort

Women students outnumbered men in both cohorts. Sixty-two percent of the students in cohort one were female. In cohort two, 68% of the students were female. Of the total number of text units analyzed, 69 percent were written by women. Figure 4 shows the percentage distribution of text units per class meeting by gender.

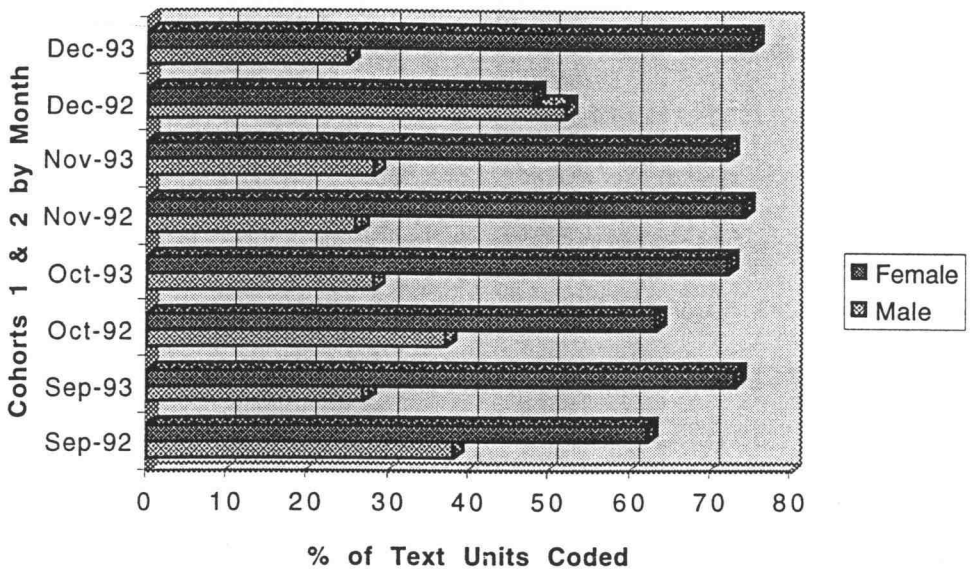


Figure 4. Percentage of Text Units per Class Meeting by Gender

## Transforming the Data: Coding and Categorizing the Data

The process of making sense of qualitative data involves description, analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). Miles & Huberman (1994) described qualitative data analysis in terms of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction involves coding, identifying themes, summarizing, and using or developing a conceptual framework to organize data and display it. Coding is both the basis for breaking down the text into categories for retrieval and the means by which connections can be made, patterns identified and theories about connections generated and tested.

A grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis involves an open, interactive, dialogical process which does not foreclose the possibility of

surprise and discovery as analysis proceeds. The full authority usually granted to theory is suspended as the researcher moves from empirical data to abstract categories and from abstract categories to empirical data. The process begins with coding the data. Three major types of coding are used in the analysis of empirical data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is the first stage in examining, categorizing and comparing data. Initial codes or labels are often based on facts, incidents, or other phenomena identified in the textual data. Central to this process is making comparisons and asking questions related to the data. Open coding also involves writing research memos to capture ideas and themes. Concepts which appear to represent aspects of the same phenomena are grouped together. This process is called categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Another aspect of open coding is axial coding. Axial coding is open coding which "revolves around the 'axis' of one category at a time." (Strauss, 1987, p. 32). It involves the further development of categories by focusing on the conditions, consequences and interactions associated with a particular category. In practice, these two, open coding and axial coding frequently occur in tandem. Open coding fractures or breaks down the data, while axial coding helps to specify subcategories or conditions associated with a particular category or phenomenon. Selective coding is the last stage and involves the development of a core category related to the central phenomenon of the study and related subsidiary categories. This approach to data analysis is intended to allow the major concepts and categories to emerge through inductive analysis of the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories onto the data. NUD*IST facilitates both coding for retrieval of text segments and the open coding which is the basis for theory development in a grounded theory approach.

The review of literature related to academic journal writing and socialization established broad parameters for the initial coding. I developed two initial schemas, outlined in some detail in the following section, as a starting point for coding the data. Data analysis proceeded in stages. The first stage involved coding background data about individual students (gender and cohort) and categorizing the types of writing in the journals. The second stage identified three dimensions or domains of student experience based on preliminary reading of the journals and the literature review: personal, instructional or teaching/learning environment, and organizational context.

## Initial Coding Schemas

Exploration and understanding of qualitative data can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Although a grounded theory approach emphasizes working "up" from data, that is deriving codes and categories directly from raw data, working "down" from pre-existing theories is also a valid starting point (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Richards & Richards, 1994). I developed "theoretical sensitivity" by reading the journals and reviewing technical and non-technical literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 48-56). Concepts and relationships identified in the literature review were used to establish frameworks or schemas which could be elaborated or modified as my understanding of the material was altered by closer examination of the text. Each document (complete set of journal entries pertaining to a class meeting) was divided into segments (individual journal entries). Each entry represents a "strip" to which the coding schema was applied. According to Agar (1986). "a strip is any bounded phenomenon against which an ethnographer tests his

or her understanding" (p. 28; see also Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Codes were modified (expanded, redefined, combined, deleted) as new segments of text were explored. Qualitative data analysis is a recursive process as the incorporation of new data or insights always entails the possibility of discovering new categories which alter the existing schema.

## Type of writing: Descriptive, Affective, Reflective

One of the research goals was to explore the kinds of writing students used to represent their learning experience in their journals. Descriptive, affective, and reflective dimensions of journal writing were frequently mentioned in the literature about journal writing as a tool for intentional learning (Cooper & Dunlap, 1991; McAlpine, 1992; Holley, 1989; Kehaney & Heinrich, 1994). These broad categories were the initial categories defined and coded. As specific subcategories were identified from student journals, these were labeled, defined, and included in the indexing scheme developed on-line in NUD*IST. In many instances, the codes or labels at this level of analysis were drawn from the text or "experience-near" concepts (Geertz, 1983, p. 57). For example, anxiety is an experience-near concept, one that anyone might readily understand as applicable to a statement such as "I felt overwhelmed and anxious." In order to preserve a sense of codes as "experience near" concepts, definitions for indexing terms applied to student writing at this level of analysis were frequently drawn from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, 1992. Major categories and subcategories are listed and defined in Appendix B.

## Personal, Instructional, and Organizational Dimensions

Newcomers to any organizational setting experience some ambiguity and uncertainty in the initial stages of "joining up." The process of learning new roles and adapting to new organizational requirements is called socialization. A more explicit definition of organizational socialization is "...the process by which an individual comes to appreciate the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member" (Louis, 1980, pp. 229-230). Students in the doctoral program, working professionals returning to graduate education, had to find ways to discern both formal and informal requirements related to the student role, adjust to additional demands on their time and energy, and develop interaction strategies with faculty and peer colleagues in the program. The journals reflected many of the challenges students faced during the first few months of the program. My "local" knowledge gained as a participant in the program combined with review of literature related to organizational socialization led to an initial coding schema organized around personal, instructional, and organizational dimensions. This conceptual framework is outlined in Figure 5.

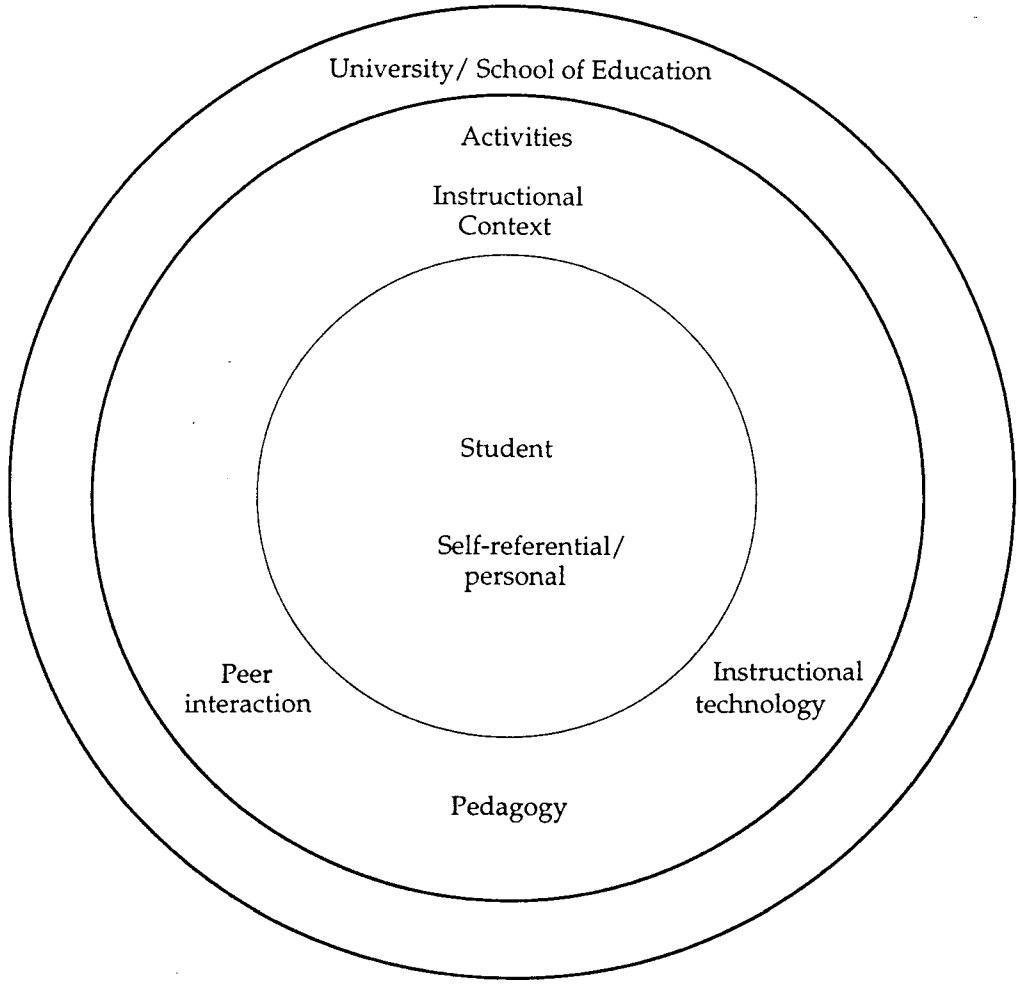


Figure 5. Conceptual Framework for Personal, Instructional, Organizational Dimensions as Represented in Journals

## Exploring Connections

After the journals were entered into the NUD*IST document system, coded, indexed and structured into hierarchical relationships within the two focal areas of interest, connections between types of writing and particular aspects of student experiences were explored by using the search capabilities in the qualitative data analysis software. Patterns of similarities and/or differences between cohorts were also identified.

## Analytic Rigor and Interpretive Validity

In the preceding sections I described the application of grounded theory methods in a study of course-related journals written by graduate students The primary data are qualitative. The data analysis procedures are also qualitative in that they require intense interpretive engagement with the data for the purpose of describing categories, patterns and themes. Qualitative research is sometimes viewed as unsystematic and lacking standard means for assuring validity (Griffin & Ragin, 1994; Maxwell, 1992; Mishler, 1990). In some accounts of qualitative research (including some research cited in the review of literature above), it is very difficult to understand what was done with the data, how codes and categories were determined, or the evidential bases for interpretation. It is important to consider the means by which the outcomes of a discovery process are produced because "product is what process makes it" (Walshe, 1987).

Strauss & Corbin (1990, pp. 252-253) provide evaluative criteria for assessing the research process in a grounded theory study. In their view, the researcher should provide information about: (1) how participants in a study were selected and on what basis; (2) how major categories of the analysis were determined; (3) what events, actions, incidents in the empirical data served as indicators of major categories; (4) data management and coding procedures.

In an editorial introduction to a special issue of Sociological Methods & Research, Griffin & Ragin (1994, pp. 18-19) suggest that "Analytic rigor does not rest with the application of technique per se, but rather is a consequence of explicit, systematic, and methodologically self-disciplined stance toward data collection and analysis and the use of evidence to advance and sustain inference." They advocate formal methods of qualitative analysis as opposed

to "analysis by anecdote" (1994, p. 19) because the formalization of methods "produces results that are open to public scrutiny and capable of replication" (1994, p. 18).

The issue of validity in qualitative research has been addressed in a variety of ways. Qualitative researchers do not agree on strategies to assure validity or even, it seems, on definitions or types of validity which are applicable in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1992; Wolcott, 1994). Wolcott (1994), for example, argues that "validity serves most often as a gloss for scientific accuracy among those who identify closely with science and for correctness or credibility among those who do not" (p. 347). Although he identifies nine "validity-enhancing procedures" employed in his own work, he also suggests that the concept "does not serve well as a criterion or goal for qualitative research" (Wolcott 1994, p. 365). Maxwell (1992) offers a typology of validity based on his conception of the kinds of understanding that are the aim of qualitative research. These are descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalizability and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity has to do with the descriptive accuracy of the researcher's account of what was seen, heard, or transcribed; those acts which are, in principle, observable and subject to verification by another observer. It is descriptive validity which I have addressed by systematic documentation of the research process and analytical procedures.

Interpretive validity, in Maxwell's view, refers to the validity of the researcher's construction of participants' meanings. The researcher's interpretation should be based upon the participant's own accounts and, therefore, the relevant consensus for the terms used in interpretation rest to a substantial extent in the community studied" (p. 290). I addressed interpretive validity by relying, for the most part, on the participants' own

words for the conceptual categories. As an additional check on interpretive validity, two members of cohort one and two members of cohort two were given draft copies of the findings. Their comments indicated that they recognized their experience in the categories and narrative description. My representation of contextual issues was also supported by member checking. Appendix D includes the written response of one cohort member who reviewed the findings.

The above mentioned perspectives on analytical rigor (especially formalization of qualitative analysis methods) documenting the research process, and interpretive validity were embedded in procedures for data collection, data management, and development of coding schemas. Elaboration of coding schemas, conceptual relationships and generative questions which emerged during data analysis are presented in the following chapter. Generalizability is not at issue in this study which was undertaken primarily for the purpose of grounding local understanding of a new doctoral program in the perspectives of participants.

# ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

> To turn from trying to explain social phenomena by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain them by placing them in local frames of awareness is to exchange a set of well-charted difficulties for a set of largely uncharted ones. (Geertz, 1983, p. 6)

## Making Sense of Individual and Collective Experience

Student journals are individually constructed accounts of experience and tools for thought. To identify and interpret patterns of representation in journals submitted by two cohorts of graduate students in new doctoral program, I re-contextualized individual accounts in a grounded theory approach to qualitative analysis. My research objective is to develop "local knowledge" of social phenomena rather than "grand textures of cause and effect" (cf. Geertz, 1983). In general, I was interested in how adult students would construct meaningful written accounts of the cognitive and social dimensions of a new learning situation. How would students make sense of their experience in journal writing and what common features of the collective experience of two cohorts might be identified? The research questions are expository and non-directional due to the emphasis on discovery and interpretation.

To address these questions, composite documents of journal entries covering eight class meetings were developed, coded and categorized using grounded theory methods. This approach led to identification of "emergent" concepts which are particularly important for understanding student experience in a field-based doctoral program with non-traditional course

design and scheduling. The results of the analysis, my second order "making sense", are presented in this chapter. The chapter falls into four main sections. The order of presentation is based on a ladder of analytical abstraction which includes: (1) presentation and summary of the data in terms of coding categories; (2) repackaging and aggregating the data to explicate patterns or themes; (3) analysis and synthesis of major themes; (4) summary of findings.

The first level of analysis involves description and systematic presentation of data related to journal writing as a cognitive activity. Findings related to major conceptual categories are presented with summary statistics and data displays which illustrate differences between cohorts. General patterns within and between cohorts are identified. Shifts in emphasis in journal writing over time are noted. Conceptual labels are defined as they are presented and discussed in this chapter. A summary table of primary codes for types of writing, with definitions, is included as Appendix B. Appendix C provides short examples of student writing for each primary code.

In the second phase of analysis, journals are conceptualized as material artifacts of a process of organizational socialization as professional administrators and faculty became graduate students in a new academic program. Selected categories of writing are linked to the analysis of a basic social process, socialization, which involves social and task dimensions. Self-representation, peer interaction, and the instructional environment were salient elements in socialization. Anxiety, introspection and metacognition are conceptual categories of writing linked to self-representation. Peer relationships are discussed with reference to expressions of affinity and appreciation in order to develop a better understanding of the cohort as a

source of social support and resource for learning. The broader organizational context of the program is explored in relation to uncertainty, confusion, and student questions in the journals.

The analysis then turns to a consideration of student journals as acts of meaning which incorporate the narrator's point of view and characteristic forms of expression. The journals were context-bound forms of communication between students and the program director. Excerpts from the journals are used to illustrate the forms and functions of journal writing for program participants. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the findings.

## Journals as Tools for Thought

One of the primary objectives of the study was to assess the value of journal writing as a learning activity or tool for adult learners in a field-based doctoral program. The initial schema of descriptive, affective, and reflective writing developed out of my review of literature related to journal writing. These conceptual categories were refined and augmented as the journals were coded. Figure 6 represents the major categories and subcategories for coding descriptive, affective and reflective writing. The following discussion is organized around these primary codes and subcategories. As noted above, the list of primary codes with definitions for each category is included as Appendix B. A sample of student journal writing for each category may be found in Appendix C.

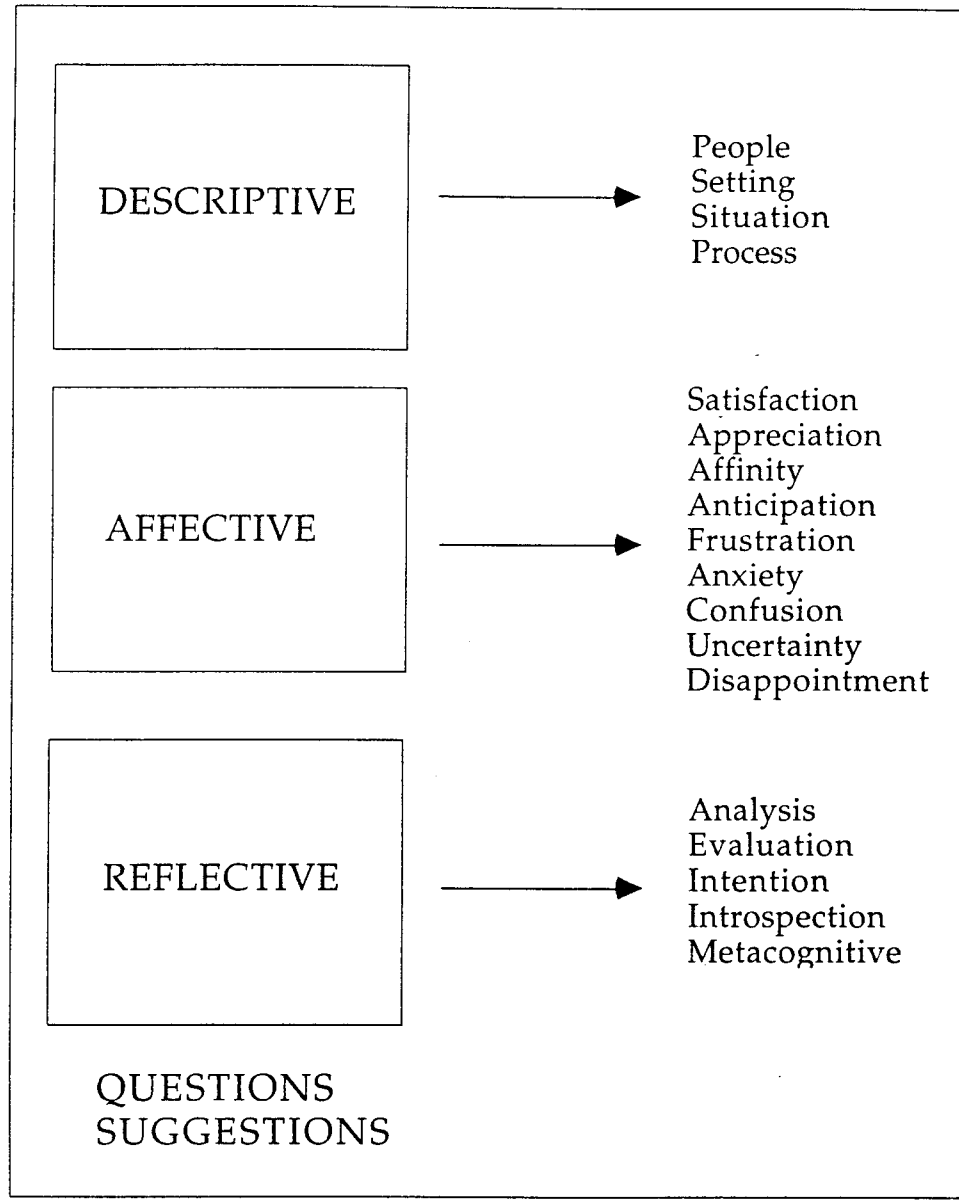


Figure 6. Primary Codes and Subcategories

Descriptive Writing

Description involves relating the "details, facts or particulars of something verbally or in writing" (American Heritage Dictionary of the

English Language, 1992, p. 505). Descriptive writing was further broken down into descriptions of people, settings, situations, and processes. (See Appendix B for definitions.) Student journals included descriptive writing in all of these categories but most of the descriptive text units were about people (9% of total text units). Within that category, journals from cohort two included far more lines describing cohort peers and faculty. In both cohorts, journal writers allocated little writing to descriptions of settings (1.8% of total text units). Students were somewhat more likely to include descriptions of particular situations (5.0%) or processes (7.8% of total text units). Descriptive writing about process was particularly noticeable in almost every student journal from cohort two for the months of September and October 1993.

## Affective Writing

Affective writing is related to various states of feeling or emotion. The dimensions of affective writing identified in the journals are displayed in Figure 6 above.

Satisfaction, appreciation and affinity are positive affective dimensions expressed in student journal writing. Affinity, as it is used here, expresses a feeling of kinship based on common interests, goals, or background. Feelings of appreciation involve recognition of the quality, significance or magnitude of people or things. Satisfaction is related to the fulfillment of a need or desire. These definitions are commonly understood meanings drawn from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1992). Figure 7 provides an overview of findings related to affinity, satisfaction, and

appreciation in the journals for both cohorts during their first term of study in the program.

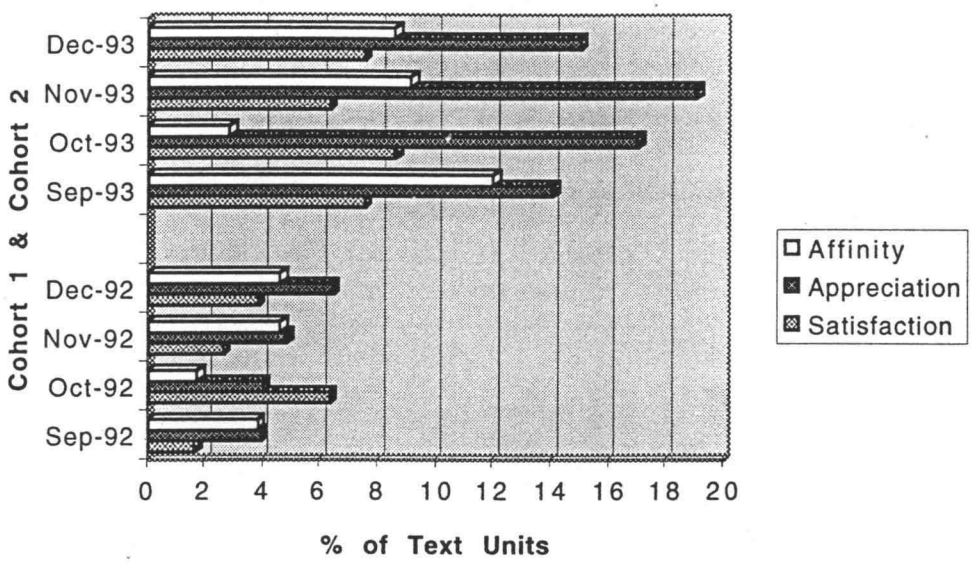


Figure 7. Percentage of Text Units Coded as Affinity, Satisfaction, and Appreciation

Journals written by students in cohort two expressed higher levels of appreciation and affinity throughout the term. Many of the cohort two journal writers commented on the strength of their cohort and expectations of learning much from one another. Although the diversity of previous experience was often mentioned, writers also acknowledged their common roots in the community college and a sense of being fellow travelers on the road to a significant life goal. Members of cohort two wrote more about appreciation for their peers and for the faculty than members of cohort one. The journals from cohort two were also more likely to include expressions of satisfaction.

Anticipation connotes looking forward to something, especially with pleasure. The total number of text units coded for anticipation equaled 5.1% (383 text units out of 7556). At first glance this might seem a rather simple or insignificant observation. Students often ended a journal with a sentence or two indicating that they looked forward to the next class meeting. It almost seemed to be a polite form of closure. But expressions of anticipation showed an interesting pattern of distribution as well as considerable variation. Anticipation was high at the beginning of the term in September for both cohorts. Following the orientation meeting in September 1992, 7.6% of text units in journals written by members of cohort one expressed anticipation. In September 1993 (cohort two), 8.3% of text units expressed anticipation.

By the end of the term, cohort two journals included even more lines in this category with 9.0% of total text units for December 1993. Seventeen of nineteen journal writers were "looking forward with pleasure" to a number of things. Nine students mentioned looking forward to the ethics class in Winter term 1994; doing the readings, discussing ethical issues, sharing multicultural perspectives, etc. This is in striking contrast to cohort one where only four students expressed anticipation in journals following the December 1992 meeting.

Frustration and anxiety were also part of the text of student experience. Expressions of worry, care, concern, stress, uneasiness and apprehension were included under anxiety. The total percentage of text units coded for anxiety was equal to 4.1%. Frustration, a feeling of being prevented from accomplishing some purpose or desire, was indicated in 5.3% of the total number of text units. These two categories, however, were quite different for cohorts one and two. These differences can be seen in Figure 8.

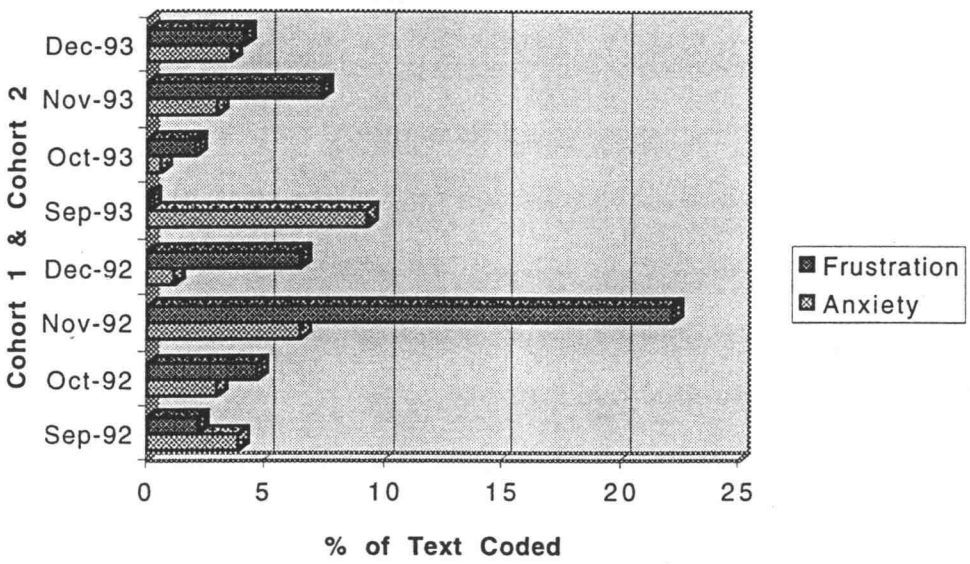


Figure 8. Percentage of Text Units Coded as Frustration and Anxiety

Members of cohort two expressed considerable anxiety in journals written after the orientation meeting in September 1993. There were 124 text units dealing with anxiety for a percentage total of 9.2% of the total text units for September 1993. There were 24 separate blocks of text coded for anxiety spread throughout the collective transcript of eighteen journals submitted for that month. Yet in the following month, October 1993, only two journals included any writing about anxiety (seven text units out of 1199 or .58%).

Frustration appeared to peak for members of both cohorts following the November meetings. For November 1992 (cohort one) 22% of the text units expressed frustration. This compares with 7.3% for cohort two members for November 1993. Fourteen of 16 students in cohort one indicated some level of frustration in November 1992. Twelve of 19 students in cohort two

reported feelings of frustration after the November 1993 meeting but this was still an anomaly for cohort two.

Expressions of confusion or uncertainty were relatively few. Uncertainty reflected a feeling of not having sure knowledge, something not known or established. Text units coded for uncertainty occurred in 5 out of 8 documents. Only 1.4% of total text units indicated uncertainty. Expressions of confusion, a sense of being unable to think or act with clarity, were even more infrequent. Again, 5 documents of 8 had text units coded for uncertainty. Only 49 text units (.65% of 7556) were coded in this category. Although these two categories were not major in terms of the amount of writing, there were common underlying issues which created uncertainty or confusion. These included the selection of committee members, finding or narrowing a topic for research, and questions about the internship requirement.

Expressions of disappointment were infrequent except in journals following the November 1992 meeting of cohort number one.

## Reflective Writing

In this study, journal writing was considered to be reflective when it showed some characteristic trace of reflection. Mezirow (1991) defined reflection as "the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience" (p.104). Reflective writing was coded in the following sub-categories: analysis, evaluation, introspection, metacognition, and intention. (See Figure 6 above.) The relative emphasis given to these different dimensions by journal

writers is indicated by the percentage of text units in the complete file of eight documents. In rank order from largest to smallest they are metacognition (15%), introspection (13%), evaluation (11%), analysis (8.1%), and intention (3.9%). These are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. It is clear that a significant portion of journal writing showed reflection. Text units were coded for metacognition when the text showed "knowledge about and awareness of one's cognitive processing" (Winne & Perry 1994, 213). The overall percentage of text units coded for metacognition was 15%. Journals for the orientation meetings (September 1992 and September 1993) showed relatively small percentages of text units in this category. After coursework began, however, student writing in this category increased substantially as indicated in Figure 9.

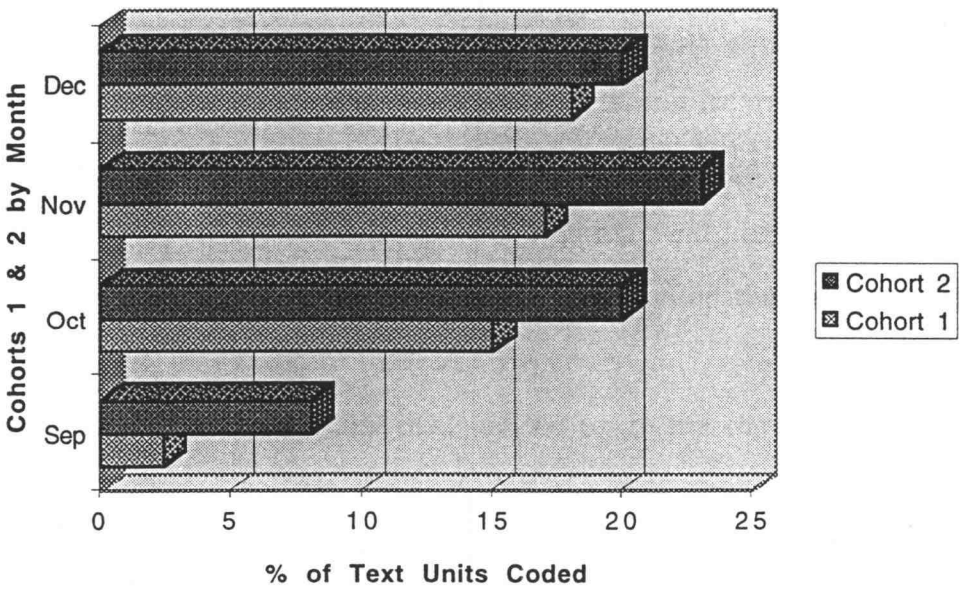


Figure 9. Percentage of Text Units Coded as Metacognition

The two cohorts show a very different profile in terms of the amount of writing which appeared to be introspective; i.e., the contemplation of one's own thoughts, feelings, sensations. Not only is the percentage of text units in this category consistently higher for cohort two, almost every individual entry includes some text units in this category.

The journal writing assignment, as introduced by the program director, was supposed to be a mechanism for evaluating instruction and other aspects of the program. To evaluate is to fix the value or worth of something. In this category, cohort one tended to be more evaluative in their journals. This tendency is particularly noticeable in journals for September and December class meetings in 1992. In September 1992, 26% of text units from cohort one were evaluative. The corresponding figure for December was 23%. Journal entries from cohort two were most evaluative in November, 1993 with 18% of text units coded as such.

Analysis involves dividing into elemental parts or basic principles; reasoning or acting from a perception of the parts and interrelations of a subject. At first glance, analysis does not appear to be a significant feature of journal writing, especially for cohort one. This may only reflect a tendency to code text with a clear evaluative dimension, even when the evaluation was based on analysis, as evaluation rather than analysis.

A very small number of text units ended up in the category of intention (reflective writing about a specific objective or intentional course of action). The overall percentage of text units in this category was 3.9% (294 text units out of 7556). Journal entries from cohort two included more writing about plans for future actions or objectives.

## Questions and Suggestions

The original coding schema did not include categories for questions and suggestions. Students frequently offered specific suggestions related to program planning, procedures, instructional issues or activities in their journals. They also asked questions about a variety of topics related to the program, departmental or university procedures. Questions and suggestions were coded separately from the other dimensions of student journal writing. These two categories comprised about 5.9% of total text units. Journals from students in cohort one included more text units in both categories than journals from cohort two during the first quarter of participation in the program.

## Emergent Concepts: Cohort Connections

Some of the most interesting observations about the journals are not about the types of writing but other notable features of the content. The cohort was an important feature of student experience for both groups of students as they started this degree program. Most of the coding in categories of appreciation and affinity expressed affective ties to other individual cohort members or to the group as a whole. A good example of this "we" feeling is found in a journal from December 1993:

> Concerning the presentations, Cohort 2 certainly has a wonderful sense of humor. The presentations were all professionally done, but we all ran over our five minute limit. It was quite humorous toward the end of the speeches, when the buzzer rang, in unison at one point we all chimed in, "What are some of the implications of...?" Since this was now the question and answer period,

> everyone burst out in laughter. I am impressed with our group! We are learning together and taking care of each other at the same time. The good nature of the group makes up for the stressful part of the learning process. (181-189, December 1993)

This passage is only one example of the sense of unity which developed among cohort members. There were quantitative and qualitative indicators of the impact peers had on each other. A text word search for "cohort" revealed that 4.6% of the total text units included the word cohort. Although in some instances this reflects the replacement of student names in the journals with the generic identification [cohort member], the number of references to other students reinforced an emphasis on peer relations as an aspect of socialization. The importance of peers as resources for learning and mutual support is presented in more detail in the following discussion on socialization.

This phase of analysis reduced the complexity of data by coding types of writing and the development of conceptual categories which adequately describe types of writing. In the following section, I take a closer look at the content of the writing in an effort to identify themes, trends, and relationships in the data.

## Socialization in the Learning Environment

In the second phase of analysis, I used a different set of sensitizing concepts to look at the journals. With socialization as primary conceptual category of interest, the socio-cognitive dimensions of experience as presented in the journals move to the foreground. Socialization in any organizational setting involves the transmission of values, norms, knowledge, beliefs, and

skills associated with skillful performance in that setting. Individuals learn what is required for skillful practice or performance in order to participate fully in a new organization. They bring with them their own pre-existing commitments, knowledge, values, and skills which impact the new group and its goals.

Social integration and competent performance are associated with successful socialization in many settings. To some extent, all academic settings involve socialization. The formal purpose of graduate education is professional development and training; the expansion of skills and knowledge. A degree program establishes a context for the development of collegial relationships and peer support, performance expectations and structural or organizational factors which affect student performance. The initial coding schema for socialization included three dimensions. The first dimension was the personal dimension: the individual's point of view and self-representation in the journal. The second dimension was the learning environment, especially action/interaction with peers, faculty, and tasks associated with learning. The organizational context was the third dimension. Departmental, university, and work organization requirements, constraints, or support for the learner were included in this category. The coding paradigm recommended by Strauss & Corbin (1991, p. 99) was used to "link subcategories to a category in a set of relationships" which encompass context, conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences.

Using this paradigm model to systematize observations requires a slightly different view of the journal as a socially situated cognitive performance, rather than a simple cognitive tool or composition activity. (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991; Resnick, 1987). Journal writing involved

constructing meaning within a particular organizational context - in this case, a program of graduate study.

The presentation of results related to socialization is in the form of extended text display organized around salient dimensions: personal perspectives and self-representation; social interaction in the learning environment; and features of the larger organizational context.

## Personal Perspectives and Self-representation

The journal allowed students to introduce their own sense of identity and self-knowledge into the instructional encounter. Research on competent performance frequently points to the importance of self-concept and the ways in which individuals evaluate their ability (Cross & Markus, 1994). Adult students seeking a doctoral degree might be expected to have a fairly good understanding of the social roles and task structure associated with graduate study. The students in this program would certainly be considered successful students based on prior educational experience and evidence of degrees awarded. However, many participants had completed master's degrees 10-15 years before they enrolled in the doctoral program. Starting this new program aroused feelings of great expectations tinged with fear and anxiety. In this section I focus on expressions of anxiety and student strategies for coping with the demands of graduate study.

Students were often quite introspective about the fears associated with becoming a student again. This anxiety was described in several journals written after the orientation meetings in September by invoking memories of the "first day of school" or "going back to school, "feeling like "nervous

kindergartners," and other similar phrases. Nonetheless, the actions and planning strategies of experienced students and employed adults are immediately evident in the accounts provided to the program director. Some coping strategies were explicitly task oriented as the following example shows.

> At this point in time, I feel excited, tired, and a bit apprehensive. How will I do, balancing all the aspects of my life, and yet performing to the level that I believe I'm capable of in this program? My biggest task in the next week is to "relearn" the library systems at PSU, PCC, and Lewis & Clark. I KNOW I'll feel more in charge of the next few years when I'm more skilled at accessing information. (892-899, September 1993)

Other expressions of anxiety took the form of doubts about learning abilities, feelings of inadequacy or other personal issues. An example of anxiety addressed with a very different coping strategy comes from a member of cohort one:

> With the pressure comes all the old feelings of inadequacy. Am I really in the right place? Do I really belong in a doctorate program? Do I still believe this after all the success I have had in my Masters program and certainly in my work? Perhaps one of the best reasons to go through a program with a cohort is to have the support of each other. The ride home with 5 of us asking almost the same questions and sharing some of the same anxieties helped. Underneath, or perhaps on top of all these emotional rumblings is the stimulation and the joy of learning. (659-666, October 1992)

The importance of peer support is one of the most prevalent topics in the journals. It becomes a prominent theme in the later discussion of peer relations in the learning environment.

A very specific form of performance anxiety emerged toward the end of the first term as students wrote about test anxiety. In this excerpt a member of cohort two was able to draw on her teaching experience for an effective coping strategy.

> I experienced my first bout of test anxiety in a very long time. After the tests were passed out and I had surveyed the test, I decided the variable that I would address in my response. I was ready to outline my answer and I could feel the butterflies fluttering in my stomach and my mind going blank. I knew if I didn't pull it together that I would be in trouble. I began to practice all the test anxiety reduction techniques I teach my students, began to brainstorm the important points that I did not want to lose and my thoughts began to flow. I must be a little out of practice when it comes to taking tests. (219-227, December 1993)

In each of the three examples, the student expresses some anxiety but immediately identifies a way to address the anxiety. As employed professionals with years of experience, participants in this program had well-developed problem-solving strategies for specific academic tasks as well as general feelings of anxiety. In this respect they may be unlike younger graduate students in more traditional programs of graduate education who are developing discipline-centered professional identities (cf. Egan, 1989). These examples also indicate the value students placed on the joy of learning, the need to feel in control, and making connections with previous experience.

Another student, reflecting on her "lapse of confidence," addresses her experience in a very different way. At the end of the first term she wrote:

> I have a sense of achievement and am now confident enough about my ability to succeed to tell people that I am in graduate

> school and am pursuing a Doctoral degree. Before completing this quarter, I was sharing the news with just a few of the people who really know me well and believe in me and my ability. I don't know why I have had this lapse of confidence, I have always been an excellent student and I have been very successful in my job. My career in education has exceeded my early expectations and I feel that I have found something I do very well. (45-53, December 1993)

The writer shows considerable self-awareness and is willing to share both her doubts and her sense of achievement with the program director. The strategy for dealing with self-doubt by limiting disclosure to those who believed in her ability was a comparatively long range strategy unlike the task, peer support, and test-taking strategies mentioned above.

## Learning Environment

The learning environment is the "interactive milieu in which instructional activities are introduced, engaged, and evaluated" (Winne & Perry, 1994). Fellow students and program faculty were important features of the learning environment for students in this program. Being part of a cohort was reinforced for participants from the beginning as a feature of program design intended to nurture a supportive peer culture and develop team building skills. This was especially notable in the journals from members of cohort two. Journal entries following their first orientation meeting included many observations of how they felt connected to one another. For example:

> One of the strengths of the program is the engagement of the cohort in the process of our own learning. Cooperating with my

> peers is a learning process which will help lead us toward participatory leadership. I sensed the bonding beginning between members of the cohort and within our small group. We will give each other a great deal of support and caring and we will take an interest in each other's progress and success. (170-176, September 1993)

Another student wrote:

> The other facet of this program that is so exciting is the concept of the cohort. I get so much more out of learning when that experience is shared...Our cohort is made up of such a diverse group of people. I really believe that I will learn more from spending the next two years with this group of people than from the course work itself. It still amazes me that it took us five hours to get through with our introductions! I felt an immediate camaraderie with the cohort. I hope that the others felt this way also. (201-203 & 217-222, September 1993)

Throughout the first term there were many similar expressions of appreciation for the cohort. Following the December 1993 meeting someone wrote, "Above all else, we need to protect the cohort relationship. It's rare; it's delicate, and it's powerful! We've really got something here" (117-118, December 1993).

Members of cohort one did not write as often or as much about the cohort as an entity compared to the second cohort. Their journals included fewer expressions of appreciation and affinity for other cohort members but affective ties to their peers appeared to increase throughout the term. An excerpt from a journal submitted after the October 1992 meeting is indicative of student perceptions of the cohort:

> What a group! This cohort with few exceptions is very insightful and very willing to commit some good intellectual resources to the group discussions and the work group

> assignments. There are only a few of the usual passive participants and not many who are unwilling to share the discussions with other points of view. (167-171, October 1992)

Although there were differences between the two cohorts, the journal provided a means by which students could affirm their identity as a cohort.

Students' observations about teaching were quite different based on accounts provided in the journals. There were differences within the cohort groups and between cohorts one and two. The first term course, Social, Political, and Cultural Foundations of Education, was the same for both cohorts but taught by different faculty. Quality of instruction was a big issue for some members of cohort one who were highly critical of instructional design and delivery during the first term. Frustration peaked following the November 1992 meeting. One student's critique of the class included the following comment:

> We have had "busy work" assignments which have not been at all connected to the class goal or objectives, we have not, except by these questions met the goals of the class. The timelines were an utter waste of time, with or without as it seems from the note from [instructor] our input to try to make it a worthwhile learning tool. The bibliography assignment is just so much busy work. (724-729, November 1992)

Another student wrote:

> It seemed that we spent very little time focusing on the historical information, however. If the primary goal of the course is to understand the various forces impacting, particularly, the development of junior and community colleges in the 20th century, we have spent disproportionately little time on this. (360-364, November 1992)

Students expressed frustration and disappointment about the course in the journals but they also offered concrete suggestions for improvement. Members of cohort one met with the program director prior to the December class session to open up a public conversation about instructional quality. Journals included recommendations such as the following:

> I think the old paradigm of having professors teach in the manner in which they have done in the past is not appropriate for this class. I would advocate for the development of a mission statement of teaching and learning expectations for this Doctorate Program. Such a mission statement might include specific expectations of professors in terms of instructional strategies and tactics. I can imagine this would rock the boat, but it seems an appropriate means to require faculty to meet the needs of the cohorts and the vision of the designers of this Doctorate Program. (363-370, December 1992)

The same course, taught one year later by a different faculty member, generated entirely different views from students in the second cohort. They were, without exception, pleased with the quality of teaching. Students respected the professor's subject knowledge and expertise in the classroom. After the first class meeting, one student wrote:

> How impressed I was! It is not that I didn't expect good teaching, its just that I would not have predicted how good. As he [professor] said, we just did three weeks of school in one weekend! It takes an exceptional teacher to command the attention and respect of a classroom of students when the instruction is condensed over such an intense several hours. It also takes an extraordinary teacher to face a group such as this one. Educated, opinionated, experienced and obviously expectant, this group could not have had a better beginning. (32-40, October 1993)

Another complimentary view of the same class session identifies specific instructional skills valued by the student:

> I was exhilarated by the class. First of all, [professor] is an excellent instructor. His teaching methodology provided the student with a multisensory approach to learning. This teaching style is something that I encourage instructors at [community college] to use when instructing students with learning disabilities. We were given opportunities to work in small groups, discuss, listen, analyze, move around, use fine motor and gross motor skills and have a really great time in the midst of it all. Watching him provided me with ideas on how I might approach teaching. We are not given ample opportunities to observe 'good' teaching and this was an opportunity I was happy not to have missed. (231-241, October 1993)

The journals thus registered student evaluations of course quality and teaching style from the perspective of community college faculty and administrators whose expectations reflect years of experience in providing post-secondary educational services.

## Organizational Context: School of Education, Graduate School and University

The university, the graduate school, and school of education were organizational entities which occasioned little comment from students in journals written during the first four months of participation in the program. Features of this program which made it attractive to and feasible for employed professionals, such as monthly meetings at off-campus locations, served to keep participants somewhat removed from traditional forms of attachment to the university setting. The relationship of students to the

Previous research on graduate student socialization suggests that student-advisor relationships are very important. Participants in campus-based degree programs ordinarily have opportunities to interact with prospective major professors and graduate council representatives. In this program, however, students were assigned to faculty in the school of education who would function as their major professor. Although students did have an opportunity to request a particular faculty member, they usually had little or no interaction with the faculty prior to making their request. They also did not choose graduate council representatives. The program director contacted potential graduate council representatives on campus (from a list provided by the Graduate School) and confirmed those assignments. The perceived importance of a "good match" between student and committee members was underscored in the following observation by a member of cohort two:

> It is somewhat stressful for me to be asked to help select a major professor so soon with so little exposure to the faculty. I fully realize the importance of a good match. My dissertation proposal at [another university] was "torpedoed," not by my major professor, but by the graduate representative I had selected based only on her primary interest areas. Hence, I do not want to spend my energy and dollars again to run into a wall. I hope that I will have a major professor who not only challenges my intellect and creativity but who wants me to succeed as well. This calls for a leap of faith at this point. (1174-1183, September 1993).

By the end of the term students most students had met with their major professors and were making connections with other committee members by telephone or scheduled meetings.

## Journals as Narratives and Communication

> In real life every beginning has its antecedents, and an ending does not imply that time has stopped or that the event is over. We create the units of experience and meaning from the continuity of life. Every telling is an arbitrary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others; that is, every telling is interpretive. (Bruner, 1986, p. 7)

The application of a particular set of conceptual tools and procedures to a composite text is only one way of "making sense" of student journals. Journal writing can also be considered an interaction strategy designed to communicate something about the students' experience or thinking (cognition) to the program director. The process of reconstructing an account of experience involves making it sensible for the reader. Journals are artifacts of the relationship between students and the program director but they are dialogical acts in a collaborative process of meaning making. It is in this sense that the narrative aspects of the journal can be recovered. The previous analytical strategies "decomposed" the journals to examine particular features of the writing or patterns of student experience. Now the field of vision shifts in order to reframe journals as narrative acts of meaning and expression in a particular context. (Bruner, J., 1991; Bruner, E. 1986; Clark, 1990, Henry, 1994). The emphasis here is less on types of writing and more on journal writing as a way of interpreting or narrating one's experience. If, as Bruner puts it, "Life consists of retellings" (1986, p. 12), writing a journal as an account of a learning experience is a particular kind of retelling.

Student journals were narratives written for the express purpose of communicating with the program director. The students were "authors" or narrators. The program director was the nominal audience for the retelling -

the narratee. Looking at the journals as "units of experience and meaning" suggests an alternative, more holistic view of expressive conventions of journal writing rather than developing a typology of student writing in terms of reflective, descriptive, and affective dimensions.

Several students in each cohort sought clarification or reassurance from the program director about the journal writing assignment. A student in cohort number one restates the assignment in his own words and locates it within his understanding of the program:

> One of the requirements of the program is to keep a journal. The [university] faculty in the School of Education are currently engaged in the process of developing this new program. It is a creative and innovative approach and diverges from the more traditional forms of doctoral programs. Consequently, they are interested in the observations of those that participate in the program - what they like, what they don't like, what they see that could be improved, etc., as sort of a 'feedback loop' in the process of development. (248-255, September 1992).

This matter-of-fact summary of the requirement can be contrasted to this paragraph from another student's journal which raised some concerns about openness and candor:

> We were asked to keep a journal and give a copy of same to [program director] as we move along. I am reluctant to share my notes, but I can see value to doing it as long as ground rules can be established. I sure don't want to feel as though I can't write freely about my reactions. Your thoughts please? (166-169, September 1992).

Many students did not mention any reaction to the journal writing requirement, although five members of cohort two indicated in their

journals for September 1993 that they had kept personal journals in the past or had used journals in courses they taught.

Individual students took different approaches to the journal writing assignment. Some journals were quite informal in language and organization. They resembled notes or letters to a friend. A more formal style of presentation was evident in the way some journals were structured with sections clearly labeled to indicate topics or a chronological accounting of major activities. One student consistently outlined journal entries with sections headed Summarization, Reaction, and Formative Evaluation. The rhetorical strategy of labeling sections of the journal usually resulted in writing narrowly focused on the student's experience during a particular cohort meeting. In contrast to this style of journal writing, other students used the journal to integrate other life experiences into the current learning environment. The autobiographical nature of this writing enabled students to bring past and present together; reconstructing and making their own connections between personal history and new learning experiences. The following excerpt from a journal written after the orientation for cohort two, provides an example of how journal writing could weave these elements together:

> My first emotions and physical feelings: I am giddy with excitement and fear, experiencing this opportunity as a crisis of danger and opportunity. This first week of September is a critical turning point for all six members of my family. [details of changes] I bring this family perspective with me as an adult student engaged in continuing career education. I come to the "classroom" with maturity, eagerness, experience and significant discipline. I also come with strong responsibilities, relationships, and as a primary wage earner, just like the majority of students I have worked with in the community college. With this in mind, here are my thoughts about the September Cohort Meeting. (752-755 & 782-788, September 1993).

Another student made connections between course content, family history, and current work in the community college:

> The class helps me understand more the lives of the students I currently work with. Their histories in education (mostly neg. & "who needs it?" attitudes of a generation of impoverished whites) are so unlike my own. Being educated was a basic tenet in my family's culture. It boggles my mind that anyone would NOT value this. While I still wonder, I can appreciate it better after this class. (41-45, October 1992).

Both of these students are writing about their experience of themselves in the world as it relates to features of the current learning situation - comparing their own life experience to the lives of students with whom they work.

## Summary of Findings

The journal writing assignment produced a body of text which can be represented as a kind of discursive space with boundaries and particular features or characteristics. Based on the results presented here, journals are an effective means of documenting the experience of adult learners and a tool for organizing that experience into a coherent account. Creating a visual representation of the text of student experience facilitates a discussion of differences between groups of students during their first term of study in the program.

There was considerable variation within and between cohort groups in the way students wrote about their experience. The journals from members of cohort one indicated a higher level of "transition troubles." Transition troubles included higher levels of frustration related to perceived

inadequacies in instruction and lower levels of affinity and appreciation for their colleagues in the program. The "founding" cohort, based on analysis of the journals, struggled more with the ambiguities surrounding the program as well as their own doubts and anxieties. They used the journal to evaluate all aspects of the program and offered many more suggestions for improvement.

Cohort two began to develop a strong sense of peer support and collegiality at their first meeting. They had a very positive reaction to the faculty member who taught their first course and openly expressed their appreciation of his teaching methods and expertise. On the other hand, members of cohort one were critical of instructional practices (although they acknowledged the faculty member's expertise) and developed a sense of cohort identity later in the term. Interaction with peers was highly valued by members of both cohorts.

The reflective dimensions of journal writing were not limited to specific learning tasks or instruction content. Student accounts were broadly integrative and inclusive of a range of life experiences. They wrote about family life, prior work experiences, future activities and personal goals. For some, journal writing clearly enhanced their self-understanding. They were relatively candid about their insights in their self-representation in the journals. On the other hand, some students used impersonal language and thematic outlines to convey a degree of formality and distance. These rhetorical strategies did not appear to be gender related but simply a matter of personal style or preference. Although Gannett (1987, 1992) noted differences between men and women in journal writing, no pattern of gender differences in style or content was observed in this study. Both men and women, for

example, wrote about their children, about their spouses, about the impact of financial or time commitments on family life.

The journal writing assignment functioned as intended in the community college leadership program. It encouraged reflection on concrete experiences associated with learning the formation of new networks of social relationships. Journals document the individual and collective experience of students in the program. They also provided a means of communication between the students and the program director.

The narrative retelling of the cohort experience in this chapter involved a sequential unfolding of interpretive strategies. The first, formal analytic approach, was designed to focus the reader's attention on descriptive, affective, and reflective characteristics of student journal writing to foreground the use of journals as a composition or writing-to-learn activity. Patterns, themes, and emergent concepts derived from the text were elaborated in the next phase of the analysis. This approach tacitly situates the text as an artifact of student experience which includes multi-layered representations of individual and collective experience. The journals as expressive narratives which are used to communicate with, and elicit information from, the program director is the core concept of the last phase of the analysis. In the following chapter I discuss some of the implications of these findings and make recommendations for further study.

# DISCUSSION

> We learn through attending to contexts...and we can only understand others if we can to some extent share their contexts. Murdoch (1985, p. 32)

In the preceding chapter I developed a descriptive analysis of journals written by students during their first term of enrollment in a new doctoral degree program. The analytical process evolved from the juxtaposition of several theoretical perspectives, conceptual frameworks, and interpretive strategies to systematically explore specific aspects of students' experience. The findings were presented through graphs and narrative description augmented with excerpts from the journals. A shared context for understanding is grounded in this analysis.

A straightforward recitation of how experience is represented can obscure the significance of the journals as a social text. The reader/researcher can lose sight of what is meaningful about this activity of narrativizing a slice of experience. Although the study was predicated on a hermeneutic approach to text as a form of expression of experience, I spent considerable time with the analysis before I realized the full import of that position. Briefly stated, the student journals are narrative acts of meaning by which students put their experience into circulation and express their connection to the learning environment and academic community. This is most evident, it seems to me, in the effort that went into constructing a sense of shared experience that students expressed in writing about their peers and the cohort.

The research questions are re-introduced below to frame further discussion of the findings. My reconstruction of patterns, themes, and implications for practice is an effort to "make sense" of the journals as tools

for learning and representing student experience. The objective of this chapter is to provide a cogent summary of major points of interest and suggest directions for future research.

## Research Questions

This inquiry centered on the interpretation of student journals. I began with two broad questions: (1) How do adults make sense of social and cognitive dimensions of a new learning experience in written narrative accounts called journals? (2) Does journal writing have value as an instructional activity or resource for learning in a field-based doctoral program? A set of ancillary questions related to specific social and cognitive aspects were derived from these questions. Each of the questions is restated and answered below.

I want to turn first to the general question of how these students "made sense" of their experiences as they wrote journals for the program director. The students represented their experience in an expressive form by describing, defining, organizing, analyzing, evaluating, or reflecting on features of significance to them. Journal writers varied in the extent to which they included a broader range of life experiences, such as reflections on earlier work or educational experience or family life, in their journals. Some students limited their journal writing to observations on the current learning environment. The questions they asked of the program director, their evaluations and their recommendations for future classes or program changes were indicative of their level of engagement with this new learning community.

Although it is difficult to assess the value of journal writing as an instructional activity based entirely on analysis of the materials after the fact, answers to the following ancillary questions will help to fill in the picture of how journal writing was useful in gaining an understanding of the complexity of student experience.

•What are the primary issues and concerns expressed by adult students adapting to new roles, requirements, and collegial relationships?

Students had many concerns associated with beginning the doctoral program. One of the most interesting aspects of the journals was the extent to which these men and women, all with academic degrees and many years of career experience, still related feelings of anxiety, of being overwhelmed, of losing control over their learning environment. They expressed concerns about time management, about the impact on family life and responsibilities. They approached this new phase of formal learning with a complex mix of feelings. For many students, the program represented the opportunity to fulfill a dream or goal they had looked forward to for many years but had deferred for a variety of reasons. But in these early months of participation in the program, becoming a student again was not an unmixed blessing. Brookfield (1992) has suggested that some widely held beliefs about adult learning are myths rather than reality. The first myth is that adult learning is essentially joyful. Student journals provided ample evidence that this is not the case. The "joy of learning" was often tempered with anxiety, uncertainty, and frustration.

•Are there recurrent themes in student journals? What satisfactions or frustrations do students encounter?

One of the greatest sources of satisfaction expressed by students in their journals was developing a sense of shared experience with peers in the

program. Students often commented on the diversity of their cohort groups. This was generally, though not always, considered to be a benefit. The diversity they valued seemed to be the diversity of life and work experience. Cohort members occupied a variety of positions within their respective community colleges and they had diverse subject backgrounds or areas of professional expertise. Each person had a different perspective on the community college experience. There were faculty, administrators, professional support staff and counselors in each cohort. Each cohort also included one person whose background was primarily in K-12 educational administration. Class meetings allowed for and encouraged small-group collaboration. Students appeared to relish opportunities for interaction and discussion. The journals contained many expressions of appreciation and affinity for group members. Cohort two seemed to come together very quickly and journals from that cohort contained many more text units coded for satisfaction, affinity and appreciation. Eight of the 16 students in cohort one (as of June 1994) were employed by the same small Oregon community college. To the extent that these participants had prior experience working with one another, they may have felt less need to develop and articulate a sense of camaraderie. Cohort two included students from five community colleges in Oregon and five Washington community colleges. Thus members of cohort two came together more like "strangers." Their journals included more writing about their new colleagues and developing a new social network based on the cohort connection.

•Do academic journals include reflection on professional issues? Do students use journal writing as a means to examine the relationship between classroom learning experiences and action in their professional lives?

One of the ways in which students brought their classroom experience together with their professional experience was in their comments about teaching and instructional practices. Student comments about the faculty and various aspects of their current learning environment were frequently couched in terms of their own teaching experience or administrative experience in community colleges. They openly expressed their appreciation of good teaching and were equally outspoken when their expectations were not met.

To some extent, the reaction of members of cohort one to the didactic style of instruction they experienced during the first term may reflect their strong feelings about particular "myths of adult learning" articulated by Brookfield (1992). The high levels of frustration noted in the journals following the November 1992 meeting were indicative that some cherished values in community college teaching culture were being ignored or violated. Student comments suggested that: 1) Adult learning should be, if not joyful, at least not painful and frustrating, and 2) "Good teachers" meet the felt needs of learners.

•Is there an identifiable narrative structure to student accounts of learning events and experiences?

Students wrote narrative accounts of their learning experiences in their own "voice" and style. Some wrote brief, structured accounts with a degree of formality in style and presentation, narrowly focused on specific features of the learning environment. Other accounts were more informal and wide-ranging; reflecting on personal and professional experience, family history, anticipation of future events and goals. Differences in style and content aside, however, students represented their experience by describing, reflecting, analyzing, evaluating, and organizing the flow of events and cognition into

readable narratives for the program director. These accounts were narrative in the "textbook" sense of having beginnings, middles, and ends. Some writers tended to be more journalistic (emphasizing chronological and factual details); some incorporated more autobiographical detail; some were more analytical and evaluative. All students used the journal to some degree to reflect on their learning and construct meaning for themselves.

•Can systematic analysis of student journals provide useful information for program evaluation and improvement?

Student journals did provide information which could be used for formative evaluation of instructional design and program planning. Students strongly endorsed collaborative learning activities, opportunities for discussion, the expectation that cohort peers were valuable resources for learning. The journals contained many suggestions for fine tuning the program such as front loading instruction by making texts and syllabi available before the first class meeting. They reacted negatively to any assignment which, in their judgement, represented "busy work." The strains associated with managing work, family, professional activities and educational commitment emerged as a minor theme. Students reminded the program director of the necessity of scheduling summer courses so they could make plans for vacation and work schedules. Other issues of concern to many students included the selection/assignment of committee members, dissertation topics, and planning for the internship projects.

I was able to compare the two cohorts of students along the lines of specific categories of writing and representation of their experience. There were clear differences between the first two cohorts in this program. To some extent, observable differences between cohorts undoubtedly reflect the characteristics of different sets of students. However, the organizational

context for their learning was also different. Some of the ambiguities associated with starting a new program had been worked out by the beginning of the second year. Students in cohort one used phrases like "shake-down cruise" and "real-time development" to describe the first few months. Faculty and students knew a bit more about what to expect the second time around. Members of cohort one were available as information resources for the new recruits in cohort two.

Systematic analysis of types of writing was a promising line of inquiry based on previous research on journal writing in academic settings (Carswell, 1988; Cooper & Dunlap, 1991; Gannett, 1987, 1992; McAlpine, 1992). Although journals written to fulfill a course (or program) requirement are not "private," there was a degree of candor and disclosure in these journals. They also seemed to fulfill the integrative function often attributed to journal writing and allowed men and women to interject their own perspective into the learning environment in their own voice (Berry & Black, 1987; Schiwy, 1994). Gannett (1987, 1992) noted gender differences in styles of journal writing in a study of college sophomores. Gannett (1987) reported that young men wrote more frequently about anger, frustration, and anxiety, especially about matters related to school and school activities (p. 89); women tended to write more extensively about personal and interpersonal experience and relationships with family and friends (p. 101). There were no comparable patterns of journal writing associated with gender in this study. This may be a reflection of greater maturity and years of experience of cohort members compared to younger, undergraduate students. Anxiety appeared to be of equal concern to both women and men. Men and women wrote about family matters and inter-personal relationships.

Overall, the findings suggest that information gleaned from systematic analysis of student accounts could be used to enhance program planning and fill in gaps in knowledge about student needs in field-based degree programs for employed adults. It should be noted, however, that this study was exploratory and limited to a specific group of highly motivated men and women who chose the community college leadership program for personal and professional development.

## Implications for Practice in the Local Context

Centering on the immediate context of the community college leadership program, the important findings can be summarized in four major points:

1. Journal writing was a program requirement and learning activity which students used to reflect on and evaluate the experience of being a student in a field-based graduate program.

2. Students used the journal as a means of communicating satisfaction and appreciation for their experiences in the program but also to draw attention to sources of discomfort or dissatisfaction. As one cohort member remarked in conversation "it gave us a voice we might not otherwise have had."

3. Developing a strong peer culture was an important source of satisfaction. Peers were valued resources for learning in this field-based program for working professionals. Instructional practices which encouraged cooperation and collaboration were highly valued. Instructional strategies

which appeared to place students in competition met with resistance and disapproval.

4. Qualitative analysis of student journal writing contributed to empirically based "local knowledge" by reducing the complexity of data, generating categories, and forming conceptual linkages. This local knowledge can be used for learner-centered program evaluation, curriculum decisions, and planning.

The systematic, structured process of analyzing student journal writing and related social and cognitive dimensions of student experience employed in this research project is labor intensive and time-consuming. For purposes of ongoing program development, the process could be streamlined by sampling and/or limiting the focus of analysis to specific aspects of instruction or curriculum. Information derived from this approach could be augmented by interviews conducted with students who have completed coursework and advanced to candidacy. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis can facilitate such projects.

## Implications for Field-based Doctoral Programs

Students in the community college leadership program were well aware that the program was new, innovative and unlike the traditional doctoral program in education in several respects. The meeting schedule was non-traditional, the dissertation or culminating thesis would be different (although the nature of that difference was not very clear), major professor assignments and selection of committee members was handled in a non-traditional manner. The usual requirement of one year of full-time residency

was to be met in successive summer term enrollments. How does this approach to doctoral education compare to a more traditional approach and what are the implications for practice?

Tinto (1993) developed a theory of graduate communities and doctoral persistence which can provide instructive points of comparison between campus-based and field-based graduate student experiences. His model includes three stages. Stage one is a period of transition and adjustment; stage two involves developing competencies and advancing to candidacy; stage three is the dissertation stage from candidacy to final defense. Tinto (1993, p. 231) suggests that degree completion is "shaped by the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that make up the academic and social systems of the institution." At the graduate level, he argues,

> Social membership within one's program becomes part and parcel of academic membership, and social interaction with one's peers and faculty becomes closely linked not only to one's intellectual development, but also to the development of important skills required for doctoral completion. In a very real sense, the local community becomes the primary educational community for one's graduate career. (p. 232).

Student journals from the community college leadership program reflect the development of "local community" and academic membership based on interaction with peers and faculty. Absent ongoing contact with other graduate students and faculty from the school of education or the wider academic community of the university, cohort peers and program faculty remained the primary educational community for students in this program.

Students in the community college leadership program, unlike full-time graduate students, did not have access to departmental or university

communities. They were able, however, to maintain other important family, work and professional commitments. Membership in the academic community they forged with their peers in the program did not require them to relinquish other "communities." In more traditional campus-based programs, part-time enrollment may isolate students from departmental or other academic ties. In the cohort program, peers become the normative reference group or primary educational community and this may ameliorate the distancing effect of part-time enrollment.

There are several implications for practice in field-based programs based on these observations. The analysis of student journals in the preceding chapter documents the importance of peer relationships and feelings of affinity. Mechanisms to support the development of strong peer relationships and program identity are very important. Cohort programs should enable students to develop a sense of shared academic community which appears to influence academic success.

## Suggestions for Future Research

This section has two parts. First I introduce some questions for future research related to the community college leadership program and the development of peer culture as students move through coursework, advancement to candidacy and work on the dissertation. Then I offer some recommendations for research in related areas of inquiry; organizational learning and shared cognition.

Generally speaking, the attrition rate for the first two cohorts in the community college leadership program was low. Sixteen members of cohort

one completed the coursework. As of this writing, eight have completed all requirements for the doctoral degree. In cohort two, 18 members have now completed their coursework and advanced to candidacy. Two members of cohort two have successfully defended the dissertation. Although the results reported here emphasize the importance of social integration and peer support, there are many unanswered questions. Does the development of strong peer culture contribute to persistence? Do peer relationships continue to develop over the course of the program? Are cohort peers able to support one another during the dissertation stage when there are no regularly scheduled cohort meetings to bring them together? One of the gaps in knowledge which is not addressed in this study is information about students who left the program. Attrition is a loss to the program, to a cohort, and perhaps, a negative experience for the individual student. This issue bears further investigation.

The program director wrote comments on journals before returning them to students. These notes were generally positive and supportive such as "Good journal" or "I agree." He also answered questions about procedural matters having to do with the department or graduate school requirements. In some instances, the marginal notes were in the form of questions. These notes were intended, I imagine, to elicit a response or dialogue with the student. This study did not address the dialogical nature of journal writing. The impact of the program director's comments is not known. Could journal writing in this context become an extension of the academic conversation between program faculty and students? Although I noted an apparent willingness to provide critical evaluation of teaching practices in student journals, did they "pull their punches" because the program director was in a position of relative power and influence? Alternatively, did they use the

journals strategically to speak with a collective voice to influence change in the program? Occasionally when issues of concern or dissatisfaction were raised in a journal, the writer used inclusive language to suggest that others shared a particular point of view. The discursive and dialogic aspects of journal writing are interesting possibilities for further exploration.

Looking beyond the small-scale local research projects, there might be some interesting links from this study to recent developments in the fields of organizational psychology, organizational development and socially shared cognition (Isaacs, 1993; Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991). Specific topics might include the integration of newcomers into existing work groups, the effectiveness of team-building efforts, and supportive environments for creating learning communities (Janov, 1995).

This study did not attempt to elicit information about anticipatory socialization. This is often noted as an important factor in successful newcomer socialization in work and educational organizations (Bauer & Green, 1994; Turner & Thompson, 1993; Van Maanen, 1984). The journals may contain information which relates to anticipatory socialization but this was not explored in any systematic way.

## Reflections on Narrating the Text of Student Experience

In the course of this inquiry, I developed a double consciousness of the expression "making sense. " Making sense implies an active construction. A constructivist or social constructionist view of learning emphasizes that each person constructs his/her own understanding of phenomena (Gergen, 1985; Guba, 1990). This applies to a journal writer's construction of his or her

written account of the learning experience as well as my (re)construction and interpretation of the meaning of journals. The journal is an expressive form of writing which results in a material artifact of that understanding. My account of student experiences, based on my reading of the journals, is another way of "making sense" of that experience and interpreting it for another audience. As a cohort member, I was writing to learn. As an anthropological observer, I was also writing to learn; describing, defining, analyzing, synthesizing, organizing and representing the cohort experience.

According to Resnick (1987, p. 7), "In real life - in contrast to the classroom and the psychology laboratory - mental work is rarely done without the assistance of tools." The "tools" of research practice are theories, conceptual frameworks, and methods. An important aspect of developing grounded theory is integrating findings into related theories and conceptual frameworks to construct an understanding of the data. Making sense requires creating a new web of meaning, weaving back and forth between theories, concepts, and text; between the textual level and the conceptual level. Theoretical perspectives and concepts derived from the literature on journal writing and socialization provided a frame of reference for this study. In my self-defined role of indigenous ethnographer, the anthropology of experience (Bruner, 1986; Turner & Bruner, 1986) helped to situate the text as a culturally significant activity imbued with meaning: the journal as an expression. Journals were artifacts with cognitive and social dimensions produced as part of the ritual of "schooling" and expressive of student culture in this setting. The literature on journal writing as a significant tool for learning or professional growth (especially Cooper & Dunlap, 1991; Fulwiler, 1987; Gannett, 1992; Garmston, 1994), and, more generally, writing as a unique

mode of learning (Emig, 1977), reinforced a view of journals as an important feature of the landscape of learning.

Grounded theory methods kept me close to the data and open to different facets of the text. I relied on qualitative data analysis software to provide support for this project in several ways. As useful as it is as a data management tool, it proved to be equally important in facilitating exploration of the data. I created an inclusive participant text to take full advantage of the journals available to me for this study. With software support I could develop and change conceptual categories, link emergent concepts, explore alternatives, and write searchable memos to keep track of how my own understanding of the project evolved.

## Summary and Final Comment

This dissertation ranged across several disciplinary fields in a study of journals as tools for learning and representing student experience. I used concepts derived from earlier writing about journals to see how those concepts would "map" to student journal writing in the community college leadership program and facilitate representation of writing-to-learn. Common themes of student experience and cohort differences were drawn from the analysis of the textual data. I noted certain autobiographical and rhetorical features of the narrative aspects of the journals. In this chapter I reviewed the research questions and major findings. Implications for the community college leadership program and for other cohort and field-based degree programs were discussed. Suggestions for future research included related areas of interest in organizational psychology and learning

communities. I offered my reflections on the research process and specific tools that guided and supported this inquiry.

Narrating the text of my own and other's experience was a challenging journey. It was an authentic learning experience in the sense of making connections between "objective conditions" and other (personal) frames of reference. For me, it was part of a larger process of making meaning. From text to action and action to text - the hermeneutic circle is completed.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

# WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Analysis Of Class Journals: Graduate Student Writing As A Tool For Systematic Reflection And Program Evaluation.

To prospective participants in the study:

I am proposing a doctoral research project, under the supervision of Dr. Larry Kenneke, which examines student journal writing as a catalysis for adult learning as well as a tool for program evaluation.

The research involves qualitative analysis of class journals written by graduate students in the OSU Community College Leadership Program. My intent is to construct conceptual, analytical categories from the documents in order to assess the value of course-related journal writing for adult learning, for professional growth, and for program evaluation and improvement.

The confidentiality of your writing will be maintained throughout the research process. Class journals will remain at the School of Education, Oregon State University. Dr. Charles Carpenter will maintain physical custody of all documents. My access is contingent upon your written consent. Participation is voluntary. There is no penalty if you do not wish to participate in this research. You may withdraw consent at any time.

As part of the dissertation, I may wish to use some excerpts from classroom journal material in the student's own words to support or explicate the analysis. I will not use your names, names of cohort colleagues or other

people close to you, the name of your college, or city. I may also wish to use some of the material for instructional purposes or in future publications. Any use of the materials non consistent with these purposes would require your additional written consent.

Questions about the research should be directed to Larry Kenneke at 503-737-6397 of Sharon Smith at 503-452-1714.

I, _____ have read the above statement and agree to participate, subject to the conditions stated above, by granting access to my class journal.

_____ _____

Signature of researcher Signature of student

# APPENDIX B

# CODE LIST WITH DEFINITIONS

# CODE LIST WITH DEFINITIONS

PRIMARY CODE LIST - WRITING

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - PEOPLE.
Assigned if the text unit describes individual people or a group of people.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - SETTINGS.
Assigned if the text unit describes a particular setting. The context and environment in which a situation is set; the background.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - SITUATION.
Assigned if the text unit describes a combination of circumstances at a given moment; a state of affairs.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - PROCESS.
Assigned if the text unit describes a series of action, changes, or functions bringing about a result.

AFFECTIVE WRITING

AFFECTIVE WRITING - FRUSTRATION -
The state of being frustrated. Prevented from accomplishing a purpose or desire

AFFECTIVE WRITING - ANXIETY -
A state of uneasiness and apprehension, as about future uncertainties. Worry, care, concern

AFFECTIVE WRITING - ANTICIPATION -
The act of anticipating. An expectation. To look forward to , especially with pleasure; expect.

AFFECTIVE WRITING - DISAPPOINTMENT -
The condition or feeling of being disappointed. - Thwarted in hope, desire, or expectation

AFFECTIVE WRITING - SATISFACTION -
The fulfillment or gratification of a desire, a need, or an appetite.

AFFECTIVE WRITING - APPRECIATION -
Recognition of the quality, significance, or magnitude of people and things.

AFFECTIVE WRITING - AFFINITY -
A natural attraction or feeling of kinship.

AFFECTIVE WRITING - CONFUSION -
An instance of being confused; unable to think with clarity or act with understanding and intelligence.

AFFECTIVE WRITING - UNCERTAINTY -
The condition of being uncertain, doubt. Not known or established; not having sure knowledge.

<u>REFLECTIVE WRITING</u>

REFLECTIVE WRITING - ANALYSIS/SYNTHESIS -
To separate into parts or basic principles; examine methodically. The stated findings of such a separation. OR Combining parts. Reasoning from general to particular.

REFLECTIVE WRITING - EVALUATION
To ascertain or fix the value or worth of. To examine and judge carefully, appraise.

REFLECTIVE WRITING - INTROSPECTION
Contemplation of one's own thoughts, feelings, sensations.

REFLECTIVE WRITING - METACOGNITION

Knowledge about and awareness of one's cognitive processing, including specific cognitive strategies; i.e., deliberate choices a learner makes among procedures for addressing and completing a task. (Winne & Perry, 1994)

REFLECTIVE WRITING - INTENTION

A course of action that one intends to follow. An aim that guides actions; an objective.

WRITING - QUESTION -

Assigned if the text unit includes a question directed to the program director.

WRITING - SUGGESTION -

Assigned if the text unit includes a general or specific suggestion about the program, the curriculum or any aspect of instruction.

PRIMARY CODE LIST - SOCIALIZATION

PERSONAL

CONDITIONS
INTERACTIONS
STRATEGIES & TACTICS
CONSEQUENCES

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT - TEACHING & LEARNING

CONDITIONS
INTERACTIONS
STRATEGIES & TACTICS
CONSEQUENCES

ORGANIZATIONAL - UNIVERSITY & DEPARTMENTAL

CONDITIONS
INTERACTIONS
STRATEGIES & TACTICS
CONSEQUENCES

# APPENDIX C

## CODE LIST WITH EXAMPLES

# CODE LIST WITH EXAMPLES

| CODING OF WRITING | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - **PEOPLE.** | I am so happy to have [cohort member] in my group -- she's so much fun and so knowledgeable about the computer/technical details for E-mail and Internet, etc. (Sep 93, 509-511) |
| DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - **SETTINGS.** | Menucha was "campy". My bed broke and there were not enough showers and toilets. I loved the location but prefer the facilities at Silver Falls. I think others felt the same way. I did like the food but appreciated Silver Falls for the buffet instead of us having to serve one another and taking time from our groups to do so. I missed some meaningful conversation when it was my turn to serve lunch.(Oct 93, 857-862) |
| DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - **SITUATION.** | The final was almost a personal disaster. I got the klingon (sic) death crud flu-thing and was so sick I could hardly crawl on Wednesday, so I had to take it on Friday...by which time I was able to crawl pretty well. Driving and walking were still a real challenge. (Dec 92, 61-64) |
| DESCRIPTIVE WRITING - **PROCESS.** | The registration process was smooth as non textured glass. Thanks for everyone's help and foresight. You've done an incredible job of making it student friendly. (Oct 92, 215-217) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **FRUSTRATION** | The time limit and how each group did not adhere to the time limit became an issue for me in that we shorted ourselves of time in other areas that we were scheduled to cover. (Nov 93, 227-229) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **ANXIETY** | Mildly put, I am in a panic. Given all the assignments for the next class plus the work needed to complete preparation for the final, I wonder how I ever thought I would have the time to do this. (Nov 92, 649-651) |

| | |
|---|---|
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **ANTICIPATION** | Educated, opinionated, experienced and obviously expectant, this group could not have had a better beginning. My first impression and one that I expect to last, is that if [faculty member - instructor] just set the tone for this program, it will be special indeed. (Oct 93, 39-42) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **DISAPPOINTMENT** | I was really disappointed that we are only one quarter. I felt I had just gotten to know [three cohort members] and we were being torn apart. We had discovered what each person's passion was with the first group project and the second project was going to really take advantage of each person's talents. (Dec 93, 278-283) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **SATISFACTION** | Attending our orientation session was extremely satisfying; it was fulfilling in a way that I had not expected. (Sep 93, 357-358) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **APPRECIATION** | The presentations were very good. I was so glad they were timed. It kept us moving and on focus. It was a tremendous overview of what is happening in education currently. It was marvelous to hear everyone speak so passionately about their topics. The combined expertise in the room never ceases to amaze me. (Dec 92, 492-497). |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **AFFINITY** | The camaraderie that is developing during our class sessions, group activities, and especially our evenings and meals is very exciting. In my daily work, I depend heavily on a nationwide network of peers; the development of a new network of peers that spans the entire range of community college services is important to me as I look towards advancing my career. (Dec 93, 310-315) |
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **CONFUSION** | So with no clear idea of where the staff wanted to go with this class I am confused as to what main points I should focus on for study for the final. When I talk with other students they say they feel the same way. We really need some more guidance here and I hope that one of you will take the time at our December meeting to help clarify for us. (Nov 92, 673-677). |

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|---|---|
| AFFECTIVE WRITING - **UNCERTAINTY** | One step at a time. I keep telling myself. Then bam, I am meeting with [outside member] and he wants to know what will I publish, because that is the only way he get points. I was taken aback. Mostly because I am interacting in a new world. A new system that really has so little to do with my everyday world. (Nov 93, 496-502) |
| REFLECTIVE WRITING - **ANALYSIS/SYNTHESIS** | John Frye's analysis of the development of community colleges and variation in the views between national leaders and local practitioners and the general public was interesting. These are understandable differences, given the nature of society and communications at that time. (Nov 93, 848-853) |
| REFLECTIVE WRITING - **EVALUATION** | In terms of evaluating an on-going aspect of the program, if I understand this part of the journal assignment correctly, I am concentrating on how a learning environment is created within the structure of our intense, once-a-month classes. (Oct 93, 985-987). |
| REFLECTIVE WRITING - **INTROSPECTION** | I realize now, as I reflect on my feelings, that I was content because I am embarking on the final leg of a journey that I would not have even considered taking a few short years ago. (Sep 93, 357-361) |
| REFLECTIVE WRITING - **METACOGNITION** | I feel I am not the intellect others are... It has been many years since I have studied in school, even though I am an avid reader. This is a real stretch for me at times. I have to really focus in on group discussions. I hope I improve my ability to conceptualize. I do well interacting, leading, problem-solving etc., but when it comes to the abstract, it is difficult for me. One of my challenges. (Oct 93, 823-828) |
| REFLECTIVE WRITING - **INTENTION** | I am interested in leadership, and have read about leadership implications in Total Quality initiatives this term. The gender and ethnic differences in leadership tendencies are fascinating to me, and I'd like to study more in this area. I plan on reading Carol Gilligan's book during the Ethics course next term. (Dec 93, 634-638) |

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|---|---|
| WRITING - **QUESTION** | Could you review my research and statistics coursework? (Oct 93, 1016)<br><br>Could we build in a loophole somewhere to renegotiate the project if needed? (Dec 92, 157-158) |
| WRITING - **SUGGESTION** | The credit hours are not divided up in a logical way; why not divide the internship hours for tuition purposes into 3-4 hrs. classes, one per term and show the grade as C.P. until it is finished? That would give everyone a more "level pay" tuition and still allow flexibility in scheduling. (Sep 92, 127-131). |

# APPENDIX D

# MEMBER CHECK REPORT

**To:** Sharon L. Smith
**From:** Roger W. Cooper
**Subject:** Dissertation
**Date:** February 11, 1996

# MEMORANDUM

Sharon, I want to thank you for sharing the Findings chapter of your dissertation with me. As I told you, I was amazed at several things that I found. The first thing that struck me was that I could have written all of the comments you used to illustrate your "theme" or categories. Even though I wrote only one or two of them, I found my feelings in all of them. Moreover, I felt that you had fairly captured the feelings of my cohort (I can't speak for cohort two) concerning the "marginalization" of the group from the University as a whole, and specifically from the School of Education. I feel that the "Findings" chapter is as free as possible from personal bias and that it represents accurately my feelings about the program, as I expressed them in my journals. I am quite certain from my extensive conversations with others in the cohort that they would express quite the same emotions as I have - obviously, I cannot speak for them.

It was a revelation to read those comments, and see that so many of us felt the same way, and that there was so much convergence in the journals. You have given us a voice; I hope someone is listening. You have indeed "made sense" of at least my journal.